ARGOSY

NOV. 20

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

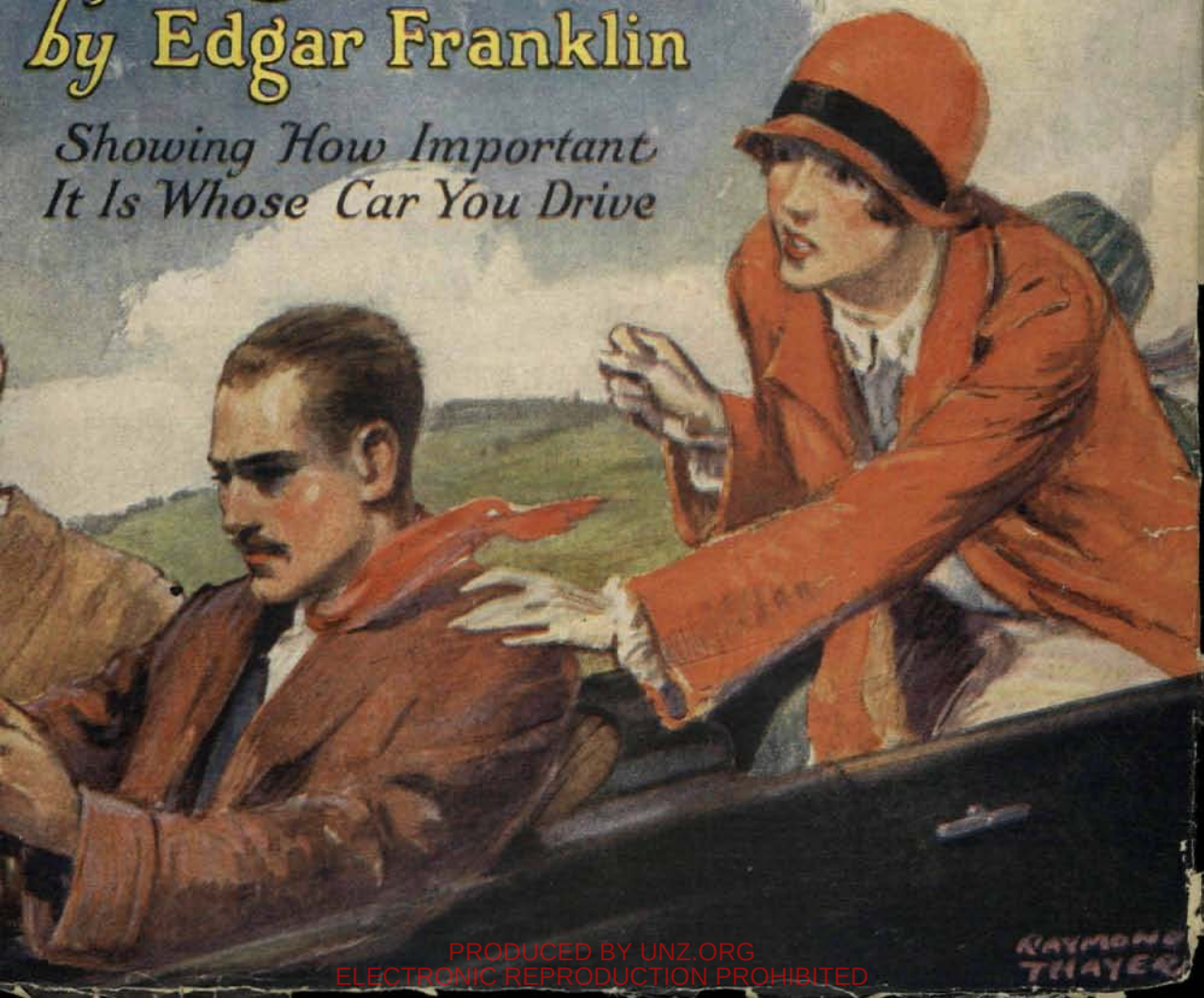
PRICE 10¢

1926

Roll Your Own

by Edgar Franklin

Showing How Important It Is Whose Car You Drive



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sale Price NOW!

$1.00 Deposit

Combination Raincoat and Warm Overcoat

Lamb Collar Submarine Coat

Men! Here is the most practical coat ever made, at a bargain price and only **$1.00** deposit! Broad shawl collar of best quality 4x beaverized lamb skin; and warm plaid blanket body and sleeve lining. Outer fabric is rippled submarine cloth with a coating of rubber between making coat absolutely stormproof. Smart stylish double breasted belted style with two large patch pockets with flaps and two muff pockets. Strapped sleeve. Length, 44 inches. Tan only. Sizes 34 to 46.

Order by No. M-1F. Terms $1.00 with the coupon, then $1.70 a month. Total price only $10.95.

6 Months to Pay!

Why pay cash when we offer you this big bargain on such liberal terms? Have this serviceable combination coat and *never miss the money!* Because you send only a little each month, so little you can easily save it out of your everyday expenses and not notice it. Six months to pay our bargain price! Send only $1.00 deposit now and when you get the coat you'll say it's the greatest garment you ever saw. Judge for yourself the big value. Then if perfectly satisfied take six months to pay for it! No risk (see coupon). Send only $1.00 deposit now while this offer lasts.

Send Only $1 Deposit with Coupon Now!

No C.O.D. to Pay!

Elmer Richards Co.
Dept. 8278 W. 35th St., Chicago

I enclose **$1.00.** Send Submarine Coat **No. M-1F.** If I am not perfectly satisfied I may return it and get my **money back.** Otherwise I will pay **$1.70** a month until I have paid **$10.95** in all.

Size Wanted_____

*Name*_____

*Address*_____

*Post Office*_____ *State*_____

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

$2500 Reward!

For the Capture of an Unknown Man

Twice he had entered the St. Clair Mansion. What was he after? Who? What was in danger?

Berteau, the famous detective, had warned St. Clair ***that the mysterious marauder would come again.*** And now—a noise in the passage! The creak of an opening door. A shot in the dark! A capture!

Is this wounded stranger the mysterious intruder? Who could tell? Yet Berteau identified the man without hesitation and won the $2500 reward.

How did he do it? Easy enough for the Finger Print Expert. He is the specialist, the leader, the *cream* of detectives. Every day's paper tells their wonderful exploits in solving mysterious crimes and convicting dangerous criminals.

More Trained Men Needed

The demand for trained men by governments, states, cities, detective agencies, corporations, and private bureaus is becoming greater every day. Here is a real opportunity for YOU. Can you imagine a more fascinating line of work than this? Often life and death depend upon finger print evidence—and big rewards go to the expert. Many experts can earn regularly from $3,000 to $10,000 per year.

Learn at Home in Spare Time

And now you can learn the secrets of this science at home in your spare time. Any man with common school education and average ability can become a Finger Print Detective in a surprisingly short time.

Course in Secret Service FREE

For a limited time we are making a special offer of a ***professional Finger Print Outfit, absolutely Free, and Free Course in Secret Service Intelligence.*** Mastery of these two kindred professions will open a brilliant career for you.

Write quickly for fully illustrated free book on Finger Prints which explains this wonderful training in detail. Don't wait until this offer has expired—mail the coupon now. You may never see this announcement again! You assume no obligation—you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. Write at once—address

University of Applied Science
Dept. 11-48 1920 Sunnyside Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCE
Dept. 11-48 — 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatever, send me your new, fully illustrated, FREE book on Finger Prints and your offer of a FREE course in Secret Service Intelligence and the Free Professional Finger Print Outfit.

Name .....

Street Address .....

City and State .....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXXII CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 20, 1926 NUMBER 1

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission.

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

Roll Your Own . . . . . Edgar Franklin 1
A Four-Part Story — Part One

Face Value . . . . . Joseph Ivers Lawrence . . 65
A Three-Part Story — Part Two

The Devil's Saddle . . . . . Kenneth Perkins 99
A Six-Part Story — Part Four

Spinning the Big Top . . . . . A. T. Locke 128
A Three-Part Story — Part Three

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

Putting Crime Over . . . . . Hulbert Footner 26
At Good Old Bearpike . . . . . Ralph E. Mooney . . . 89
Barry Loses a Trick . . . . . Gordon Stiles 119
Yuma Tom, Deputy . . . . . Joseph T. Kescel 153

POETRY

Turned Down . . . . . Peter A. Lea 88
The Village Band . . . Edgar Daniel Kramer 98
Awakening . . . . H. A. Woodbury, Jr. 127
Sunset . . . . . Mazie V. Caruthers 152

The Readers' Viewpoint 159

WAR SPAWN

By MAY WILMOTH

When the World Conflict winged its wide desolation, two brave young people struggled for their happiness in the midst of the ruck. Their story begins next week.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Reaumur
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Vice-President and Secretary
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, COPYRIGHT, 1926
Entered as second-class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
PROCESSED BY GNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination comprising:

Munsey's Magazine -
Argosy-Allstory W'kly
Flynn's Weekly - -
Minimum space 4 lines.

Combination Line Rate $3.00 less 2% cash discount

Dec. 25th Argosy-Allstory Weekly Forms Close Nov. 27th

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$11.80 DAILY IN ADVANCE (Sworn proof) Introducing New Insured Hosiery. 57 styles, 40 colors, guaranteed seven months. No capital or experience required. You simply take orders. We deliver and collect (or you can deliver, suit yourself). Credit given. PAY YOU DAILY, monthly bonus besides. Silk hose for your own use free. We furnish samples. Spare time will do. MACOCHEE TEXTILE CO., Card 27025, Cincinnati, O.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. AMERICAN MONOGRAM CO., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

LET US MAIL YOU A FREE BOTTLE OF OUR LIFE TONIC ELIXIR, FACE POWDER, VEGETABLE OIL SOAP and terms to agents. All Big Repeaters. LACASSIAN CO., Dept. 45, St. Louis, Mo.

GET OUR FREE SAMPLE CASE—TOILET ARTICLES, PERFUMES AND SPECIALTIES. Wonderfully profitable. LA DERMA CO., Dept. D, St. Louis, Mo.

ALL YEAR ROUND SALES with our big complete guaranteed line. Shirts of all kinds including silks, union made work and flannel shirts, overalls, coveralls, work pants, play suits, leather coats and vests, flannel blouses and lumberjacks. Our Booklet teaches how to make quick easy sales direct to wearer. Full cooperation. Complete selling outfit FREE. THE NIMROD SHIRT CO., 4922-28 Lincoln Ave., Dept. 55, Chicago.

66 MILES ON 1 GALLON—Amazing, New, Wonderful Vapor Humidifier—Gas Saver—and Quick Starter. For all autos, trucks, tractors. Use Winter and Summer. Exclusive Factory Representatives wanted everywhere. 400% profits. 1 Free to introduce. CRITCHLOW, P-427, Wheaton, Ill.

MAKE $75 A WEEK AND UP, SELLING OUR FINE, MADE-TO-MEASURE, ALL-WOOL SUITS, DIRECT TO WEARER—ALL ONE PRICE, $31.50. BIGGEST VALUES. COMMISSIONS IN ADVANCE. WE DELIVER AND COLLECT. 6x9 SWATCH SAMPLES FURNISHED. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., DEPT. Y-409, CHICAGO.

AGENTS, OUR NEW HOUSEHOLD CLEANING DEVICE WASHES AND DRIES WINDOWS, sweeps, cleans walls, scrubs, mops. Costs less than brooms. Over half profit. Write HARPER BRUSH WORKS, 101-3rd St., Fairfield, Iowa.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, opportunity to earn $55 to $100 weekly operating Ragsdale's original "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere; wholesale or retail. Big commercial candy book free. W. HILLYER RAGSDALE, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

HERE'S YOUR LAND! $10 DOWN AND $10 A MONTH BUYS 20 ACRES OF MY BEST LAND NEAR LAKES AND TOWNS IN CENTRAL MICHIGAN FOR $400, OR 10 ACRES FOR $250. WRITE AT ONCE FOR FREE PICTURE BOOK. G. W. SWIGART, Y-1276 1st Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago.

HOW TO ENTERTAIN

Plays, Musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, black-face skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

SONG WRITERS

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our composer wrote many song hits. MONARCH MUSIC COMPANY, 1472 Broadway, Dept. 109, New York.

DRAMATIC

NEW, THRILLING, UNUSUAL PLAYS and Playlets for all occasions. Wonderful Plots. A splendid variety of Romance, Heart Interest, Mystery and Comedy. Send for particulars. L. E. Holland & Co., not inc., 1924 Fremont St., Chicago, Ill.

HELP WANTED

MEN-WOMEN WANTING U. S. MAIL POSITIONS, $142-$225 monthly; steady; experience or correspondence course unnecessary; details free. Write M. BRADFORD, 112 Bergen, Jersey City, N. J.

HELP WANTED—MALE

MEN—EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write AMERICAN FOREIGN DETECTIVE AGENCY, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

MEN WANTING FOREST RANGER, RAILWAY MAIL CLERK AND OTHER GOVERNMENT POSITIONS, WRITE FOR PARTICULARS. MOKANE, A-12, DENVER, COLO.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN (white or colored), sleeping car, train porters (colored). $150-$250 monthly. Experience unnecessary. 836 RAILWAY BUREAU, East St. Louis, Ill.

EARN $120 TO $250 MONTHLY, EXPENSES PAID, AS RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR. WE SECURE POSITION FOR YOU AFTER COMPLETION OF 3 MONTHS' HOME STUDY COURSE OR MONEY REFUNDED. EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES. WRITE FOR FREE BOOKLET CM-30. STAND. BUSINESS TRAINING INST., BUFFALO, N. Y.

ALL MEN, WOMEN, BOYS, GIRLS, 17 to 65, willing to accept government positions, $117-$250 (traveling or stationary), write MR. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS PROCURED; TRADE MARKS REGISTERED— A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. RICHARD B. OWEN, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 41-J Park Row, New York.

PATENTS—Write for **FREE** Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch and description of invention for Inspection & Instructions free. Terms Reasonable. Prompt Attention. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

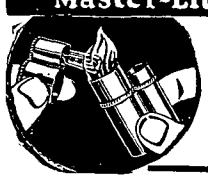
PATENTS. Write for our free Evidence of Invention Blank and Guide Book, "How to Get Your Patent." Send model or sketch of your invention for our Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms Reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 419, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. PROMPTNESS ASSURED. SEND DRAWING OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION AS TO PATENTABILITY. WATSON E. COLEMAN, 644 G ST., WASHINGTON, D. C.

JEWELRY

GENUINE SYNTHETIC STONES. $2.00 PER CARAT. Beautiful rubies; rich dark blue sapphires; sparkling white sapphires. Superb cut and polish. Round shaped. Made abroad by firm established over 100 years. Have your jeweler set them. Sizes one to four carats. Goods sent C.O.D. per insured post. RIGI IMPORTING CO., Washington, D. C.

Master-Lite Pocket Lighter



Winner for Agents
No Wind Can Blow it Out!

GUARANTEED FOR LIFE! Sells on a flash demonstration to consumers and dealers at big profits. Each sale builds an everlasting repeat business. $3.00 brings sample dozen in handsome display box with sure fire selling plans. Sample 50c. Satisfaction guaranteed.

M. B. MASTERLITE
110 East 23rd St., New York City

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A POST CARD BRINGS IT TO YOU

MY ONLY SALESMAN $2.75 for 50

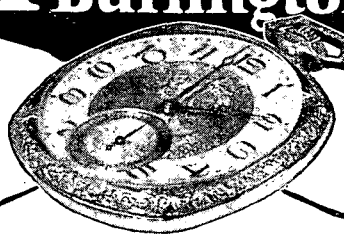
I DON'T want you to order a quantity of cigars until you try my complete line consisting of 7 brands put up as illustrated above. If after a fair trial you feel that you did not receive at least "DOUBLE VALUE" I'll return your money in full.

HOW I do it. I import my own tobacco and maintain the largest cigar factory selling for cash, eliminating book-keeping, bad debts, etc., and sell my entire output direct to the consumer. All transportation charges prepaid.

I CANNOT afford to sell more than one trial Sample case to a person at this price. Mail Check Or Pay The Postman.

JAMES B. HALL JR.
170-178 E. 127TH ST. N.Y.

21 Jewel Burlington



Only $1.00 Down

The 21-Jewel Burlington is sold to you at a very low price and on the very special terms of $1.00 down—free examination—small monthly payments.

Free Book Send for the most complete watch book ever produced. A watch for everyone! 100 designs and engravings in colors. Write for it today. It is free. A postcard will do.

BURLINGTON WATCH CO. 19th St. & Marshall Blvd. Dept. 11-48 CHICAGO

AMERICAN RED CROSS

Serves Humanity

An Invitation to Join!

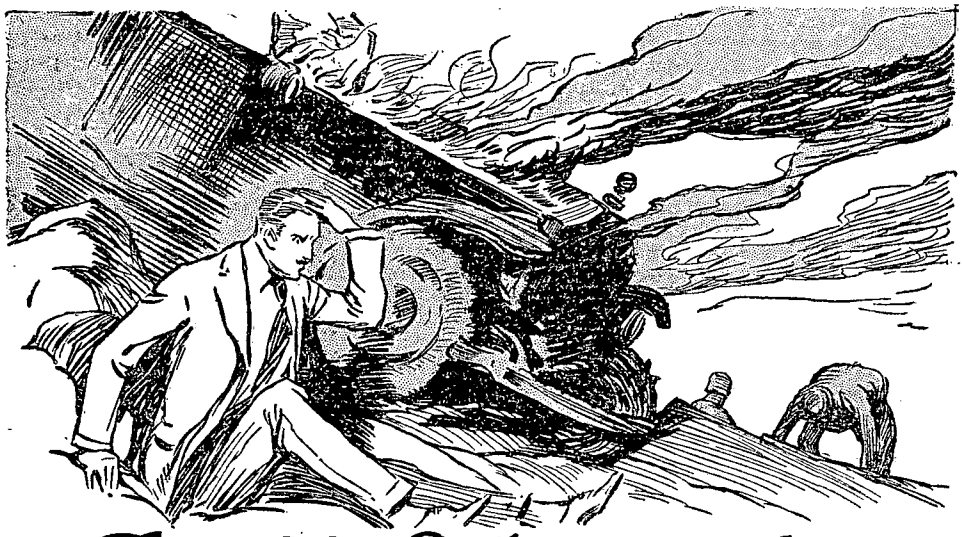
THE AMERICAN NATIONAL RED CROSS

will hold its TENTH annual Roll Call from Armistice Day, November 11, to Thanksgiving, November 25, when all are cordially invited to become members of this great organization. Membership dues paid at that time maintain the work of the Red Cross—local, national, and international—throughout the coming year.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CLXXXII SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1926 NUMBER 1



Roll Your Own

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "Poker Faces," "Suitable for Framing," etc.

CHAPTER I.

ACUTE DISEASE.

"WHO'S there? Who—" Dorothy cried breathlessly as she hurried out of the dining room toward the front door. Then she stopped short, and stared, quite open-mouthed, at James Walcott Cranning, who chanced to be her husband.

"Why, Jimmy! Are you back?" she asked blankly.

Now, this was rather a stupid remark to have come from James's ordinarily bright little wife.

Obviously, since he stood before her in the flesh and was in the act of tossing aside his hat, James had returned to his home in Sunnyvale—which is by far the prettiest of New York's farther-out suburbs—even though eleven o'clock had just struck, this brilliant Saturday morning.

"Yes, I'm back," James admitted.

"But—"

"Don't look at me like that, kid. I'm not sick," James laughed shortly, as he kissed her. "There wasn't a thing more to do in the office, and I thought I'd rather be home than sitting there."

For a moment they faced one another—as well favored a young couple as one could have found in a long day's walk. With

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

twenty no more than three or four years behind, Dorothy Cranning, exquisite blend of slim, graceful curves and lighter colorings, was an extremely attractive young person. So, for the matter of that, was James himself an attractive young person in his own way.

Even in a poor light you never would have mistaken him for a Greek god, and no artist had ever begged James to pose for a collar advertisement. If anything, his features and his form ran more to the rugged than to classic regularity. But most men and—to Dorothy's belief—all women found James a very agreeable being.

"What's the matter?" Dorothy asked suddenly.

"Eh? Nothing," sighed James, and made for his old chair in the living room.

"Yes, there is! You're all tired and nervous and— What is it? Come!"

Briefly James glanced at his wife, and glanced away again. He was, as she observed, making a brave fight to withhold bad news, on the one hand, and on the other he was screaming soundlessly for sympathy.

"Jimmy!" Mrs. Cranning said sharply.

"All right," said James with a forlorn little smile. "I wasn't going to fuss you about it, but—Mannering's sick, and—and I guess he's going to die!"

"Mannering? The man you went into the big deal with?"

"Yep! The deal that's got every red cent in it that I could beg or borrow, Dot!"

"But he was all right yesterday! Didn't you tell me he was in your office yesterday?"

"He was. Never saw him looking better, either," said Mr. Cranning, and shook his head. "It hit him about two o'clock this morning, honey. Appendicitis, with eight or ten complications. They rushed the poor old boy off to the hospital and operated at once, so his brother told me over the phone. And there's almost no hope for him!"

"Poor fellow!" said Dorothy, and stroked James's hair.

"Yes, and poor me!" cried that gentleman, quite as if he believed Mannering to have acquired his appendicitis through motives of personal spite. "You know what happens to me if he dies, don't you, Dot?"

"No, Jim."

"Well, the chances are about fifty to one that the whole deal 'll fall through, and I'll lose every penny of the twenty or twenty-two thousand I've sunk in it. And if that doesn't happen, it's an absolute certainty that everything will be tied up till his estate is settled, for six or eight months at the very least.

"Don't shake your head like that, kid; it is! I called up my attorney and asked him about it, and he said I'd be in great luck if I even got my money out of it inside of a year."

"Even so, Jimmy, you're better off than Mannering."

James laughed heartily.

"In one way," he agreed. "But I've figured on cashing in on this thing, and taking the profits before another month, at the most, and— Say, honey, do you know how much money we have in the bank for the house, for the business, for everything?"

"No."

"Less than seven hundred dollars!"

"Well?"

"And not only that, but I've borrowed every loose dollar I could lay my fingers on—from banks, from business connections, from a friend or two! Why, I was so sure this deal would go through in a hurry and net us a clean ten thousand that I even took out that little second mortgage on this house, and I'd as soon have cut off my right hand as to have done that!" James fumed on. "Dot, I've got to the point now where I can't borrow one more thin dime!"

"What of it?" Dorothy asked placidly.

Mr. Cranning stared.

"Well, among other things, there are a whole lot of odds and ends I'd like to buy for you," he sighed. "Hundreds of things that it galls me like blazes to ask you to do without—fancy clothes and fluffy—"

"All right! Now, listen to me," said Mrs. Cranning, and laid a dainty palm upon either of James's cheeks. "What

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

earthly difference does it make if you're absolutely wrecked? Ten years from now we'll neither of us remember, even, just how it happened. We're not much more than kids, Jimmy, and you'll simply start over again and make a million, and meanwhile we've got each other! What more do you want?"

"Well—"

"And as for fool clothes and stuff like that, Jimmy," Mrs. Cranning went on most convincingly, "if you think I care one little hoot about luxuries or appearances, or what anybody in the world thinks, you don't know me yet.

"Just so that I'm with you and helping you, I'm perfectly willing to go around with a burlap sack to cover my nakedness. And as for what any one else on earth chooses to say or think or feel about what we have, or what we do—bah! That for 'em! That for every last one of them!" cried Mrs. Cranning, and snapped her fingers.

Did James gasp a little before these fine, heartening sentiments? He surely did, and for a moment there was a peculiar little choke in his throat. Then, smiling remarkably, he clasped Dorothy tight to him and kissed her again and again.

She was in every sense a wife well worth the kissing!

"Golly, kid!" James said thickly. "I may be dumb in every other way, but I did something intelligent when I grabbed off you!" And, after a bone-cracking embrace, he released her, and arose and stretched himself again. "I guess I'm just a darned fool, Dot!" he said. "I was so blamed shocked and scared about old Mannering that—"

"We're going to talk about it all day, are we?"

"No, we're not," laughed Mr. Cranning. "Honey! Why don't we shake up a little lunch, and then skip into town on the twelve forty, look at a matinée, and then spend three dollars for dinner?"

"I'd love to, if we can afford it."

"Well, we can afford it," James said flatly. "And if nobody knows where I am, nobody can come telling me any more bad news. Let's hustle!"

Expertly Mrs. Cranning considered him for an instant.

The lord of the household, momentarily tottering, had been set upon his feet again. She beamed.

"I'll make sandwiches, darling!" she said. "I'll—"

"Oh, my Lord!" James gasped as he stood at the window.

"What is it?"

"Speaking of angels, you know," Mr. Cranning smiled shakily. "Speaking of bad news—here it comes! Here's the boy from the telegraph office, Dot. It's all over. Mannering's croaked!"

"Oh, but perhaps—" Dorothy hazarded as the bell rang.

"There's no perhaps about it," whined James. "No boy with anything but bad news ever came on a run like that! Will you take it?"

He may not quite have collapsed. Still there was something about James, as he returned to his chair, which suggested great, powerful forces in reserve. Fearfully he gazed at his lovely little wife as she signed with fairly steady hand; fearfully he watched the door close, the boy depart.

"So I'm done for!" he said. "But darned if I'm going to sit down and cry about it, Dot. Tell you one thing, though: I'm not going on trying to do business on my own hook for awhile. I'll get a job."

He looked steadily at Dorothy now as she slit the envelope—and read—and, yes, started and failed to show one single sign of relief.

An instant James had fancied that it might be a false alarm. Now—

"What time did he die?" he choked.

"What?" Mrs. Cranning glanced up and forced a smile. "I don't believe he did; I don't believe he's going to, Jimmy. This isn't anything about Mannering. This —oh, dear!"

"Well, what is it, then?"

Round-eyed, Mrs. Cranning gazed at him.

"Jimmy, she's coming here!"

"Who is?"

"Alice Fowler and her husband, of course."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

James shook his head.

"It doesn't mean a thing to me, honey."

"Alice Wells, Jim!"

"Oh! The girl you roomed with in college. The snippy little runt that got married a couple of months ago! That one?"

"She's not snippy, Jimmy."

"She was to me, always," James grinned. "Gosh almighty—what a shock that was! What a—"

"They'll be here in another ten or fifteen minutes!" cried Mrs. Cranning. "They're in New York, and they're going West on a midnight train. This was the only chance, I suppose, for Alice to come out and—and they'll be here in another ten or fifteen minutes!"

"Don't be panic-stricken about it, Dot. We can go to a matinée any old time, and—"

"I am panic-stricken!"

"Why?"

"Because—because—" Mrs. Cranning hesitated, and did not quite face her husband. "Oh, Jimmy, Alice's people are rich, you know; and she married a rich man, too. She—she's used to nice things, and— Jimmy, they'll be here for luncheon at least, and all I've got in the house is the cold lamb."

"Well, what's the matter with the cold lamb?" James demanded warmly.

"Nothing, of course. But—oh, you don't understand. I wish I had just—just one girl, or a cook, or "—she turned suddenly and gazed at James—"or even some fine old pieces of furniture and—"

"What do you mean?" Mr. Cranning asked amazedly. "Something to impress this little rat with?"

"Something to show her that— No, you can't understand. Alice has always had so much, and when we were together in college we used to speculate on what we'd do when—when we were married."

"And had millions to spend?"

"Not just that, perhaps, but—"

Mr. Cranning drew himself up.

"Say, pardon me, Dot!" said he. "But aren't you the lady who was saying something—perhaps five minutes ago—about not caring for the opinion of anybody alive?"

There was no real shame in the glance that flashed at James.

"I meant neighbors and—and ordinary friends."

"And this Alice isn't an ordinary friend?"

"No. We were close as—as sisters, Jim—and—oh, well, it can't be helped, I suppose. I do think she might have given me a little more warning."

"So do I!" Mr. Cranning agreed tartly. "She's bringing her husband with her?"

"Of course."

"What's he like?"

"You know as much about him as I do, Jim. We saw him at the wedding. I'd never met him before, and I've never seen him since."

"No, and I dunno's I've had any craving to see him," James reflected, for he was a candid soul. "He looked to me like a man who was trying to drop dead and found he was too strong to do it."

"You'll have to entertain him," Dorothy reflected.

"I know it. That's why I was inquiring," sighed James. "Does that telegram say how long they're planning to stay?"

"No. All afternoon and probably part of the evening. You can show him your garden."

"Is he interested in gardens?"

"I don't know. And you can show him your tools."

"Is he interested in tinkering?"

"I don't know that, either. But—Jimmy, what in the world can we do all afternoon?"

"Play bridge!" James muttered.

Alice is dreadful at it, and I believe she said that Harry doesn't play at all."

"Then we—just sit and talk?"

"I suppose so. I'll get Allie to help me make up her pet salad; she likes to do that, and it takes time. And don't rush away from the table and take the company with you, Jimmy; it's always easier to talk at the table somehow.

"What can we do after that? What can— Oh, Jimmy, if we only had a car! Alice loves to ride, and we could go up into Connecticut and poke about some of those lovely, undiscovered dirt roads we

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

used to poke about when we did have a car."

James nodded moodily.

"Yep; but the old car died of senile decay last year, you know, and a new one costs a lot nowadays. Never mind, Dot; don't you worry! We'll have another car some day soon."

"But not this afternoon, Jimmy."

"I'll hire one."

Dorothy shook her head.

"Costs too much—and there isn't a hacking car in town I'd ask Allie to ride in. So we'll just have to sit, I suppose. And gabble! And bore each other to death and—"

Just there, in the most curious way, breath seemed to fail Mrs. Cranning. Sweet lips parted, bright eyes suddenly shining, she faced her husband.

"Jimmy!" she cried. "I've got it! We'll borrow a car!"

"We'll do what?"

"Borrow a car and take 'em riding!" Dorothy repeated delightedly.

"And you've got the business card of the philanthropist who lends cars, have you?"

"We'll get Fred's!"

"Fred Budlong's?" James demanded, and his brow darkened.

"Yeppy! And it's a perfect peach, Jim. It's brand new, and it runs—"

"I know how it runs—and that's the end of that!" Mr. Cranning said very bluntly. "We're not going to borrow it, Dot. Just because you were engaged to that fat-headed bird for three weeks, once upon a time, doesn't mean that you're going to borrow any automobiles from him."

Unswerved, unshocked, Dorothy giggled.

"You promised to forget that one false step of mine. Anyway, didn't I throw him over the very evening I met you? And he's a dear; he'll let us have it."

"I'm not throwing rocks at Fred; he's dumb, but generous. That's not my point. My point is that, having been engaged to him, it's bad taste—and maybe it's not just flattering to me—"

It is possible that Dorothy did not know what he was trying to say; it is even possible that James himself did not quite know. But he was offering obstacles at a moment when there was little time for their overcoming; and it may be said that Dorothy was intelligent and knew how to deal with many kinds of obstacles.

"Jimmy, don't be absurd, and don't be jealous," she said. "If you prodded me, I might have some familiar feeling, and that would be a bit too silly. You've flirted pretty outrageously with Fred's wife several times."

"I never flirted with Irma in my life!" James cried in amazement. "I knew you had some such notion as that, too!"

"All right, Jimmy," Mrs. Cranning said serenely. "But I have not seen you push Irma away violently when she made a point of leaning against you. And once, when she rested her head on your shoulder for a moment—such a pretty, unconscious trick it was, too—you grinned like a perfect idiot!"

"Dot! If that ever happened I'd probably have felt like an idiot, but—"

"So if these emotional considerations don't make me shrink from borrowing Budlong's car, I don't see why they should exaggerate themselves in your mind!"

"All right. But on general principles, nix! I don't like to borrow things, and I never did. Cigarettes or automobiles, I roll my own!"

"And if you haven't got one of your own to roll?"

"Do without!"

Dorothy's lips tightened. In some ways she was quaint, this girl; she felt that marriage implied a certain obedience to one's husband!

"Jimmy, do you mean that you're so particular about rolling your own that you won't let me go over and ask Fred for his car?"

"I do! If there was to be any asking, I'd do it; I won't send my wife. But there isn't! I stick fast to the doctrine of rolling my own, Dot. And another thing, I don't like to act a lie. You were not planning to tell Alice this wasn't our car, were you?"

Dorothy flushed slightly.

"Possibly not. Unless they asked directly."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"So there you are!" said James. "There's nothing to this borrowing stuff—nothing but trouble, and I've got all of that on hand now that I need. We'll find some other way of killing the afternoon."

"If you should change your mind—"

"I rarely change it in a case like this, honey," James smiled firmly.

And so, he believed, the subject was closed. He understood perfectly, of course; he hated like sixty to see this girl, of all the girls in the world, subjected to what she seemed to consider humiliation. But James, to the best of his present belief, much as he liked to drive and much as he yearned for a car, would go on rolling his own!

"Very well, Jimmy," sighed his wife.

"Going to fix the table now? I'll help you set it," Mr. Cranning suggested.

Dorothy, however, held up a finger. The bell was ringing.

"There they are!" said she. "You let them in."

CHAPTER II.

CHRONIC DISEASE.

SO James let them in.

He was a very sane individual, conventional in many ways; watching him, one must have gained the impression that James was utterly delighted to welcome the recent Alice Wells and her husband.

He wrung their hands and babbled quite gleefully as he ushered them into his home.

But deep down inside James, as he dropped the limp fingers of Mr. Fowler, something or other—which must, of course, have been his spirits—was sinking fast!

Alice herself he had met on a number of occasions. She was still the same anæmic, slightly overdressed young woman, with rather mean eyes, and a rather mean mouth, with bones that were too prominent in several places, and a disposition, James could have sworn, that would have done discredit to a coyote!

How on earth a fine, vivid girl like Dorothy had ever conceived an affection for Alice was far past any understanding of James's. But he spent little time considering Alice; his attention had concentrated on Harry Fowler, her husband, and with never a pause the something inside James Cranning went right on sinking!

Fowler was not an attractive person; there was an indescribably lumpy effect to his features, and he wore a frown which was patient, and suggested a brave soul within, resolved to bear up in spite of everything, and which still contained a peevish quality. Slightly rounded he might be as to shoulders, but his anatomy seemed to be a pretty well-knit affair, and his color was excellent.

His raiment was conservative to the point of severity, and, with a considerable shock, James noted that he wore the sort of shirt long since discarded by our better grandfathers, which buttons on the back. To be sure, he was rich, and his people were rich, and Alice must have found him attractive or she wouldn't have married him; but he didn't look at all like a person with a supply of really snappy conversation large enough to last through a whole afternoon.

It was too bad. James sighed internally, and not without faint anger; he might be selfish, but on this particular afternoon he surely craved something or somebody all full of snap and good cheer.

The girls were chattering happily.

"Jimmy," said Jimmy's wife, "Allie and I have a million things to say to each other while we're getting lunch. You take Harry out and show him your garden."

"And dearest heart!" added Alice.

"Yes?" sighed her dearest heart.

"Don't stay out in the bright sun too long. It's rather warm to-day."

"No," Mr. Fowler murmured.

He glanced at James in a strangely resigned, expectant way. James took him out and showed him the garden.

"Fool much with this sort of thing yourself?" James asked.

"No."

"Don't like it, eh?"

"Haven't the strength," said Mr. Fowler, and selected the soap box on the shady side of the yard for a seat.

"You're not ill?"

"Yes."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, you don't look it," James meditated aloud.

"What in the world can you tell by the way a man looks?" Mr. Fowler demanded with plain indignation. "I'm a sick man, Cranning. There are half a dozen things the matter with me; some of 'em been hanging on since I was a boy. Some of 'em are incurable."

James—since, after all, he was the host, and so committed to a certain degree of courtesy—shook his head and clucked his tongue sympathetically.

"Shame!" he said, and cast about for some more stimulating topic.

"Yes, it is a shame," Fowler agreed heartily, and disposed himself more comfortably. "A husky like you has no idea of the handicap it puts on a man, Cranning. And it isn't as if it was just one definite thing that the doctor could get at and cure, you know.

"There's so much of my machinery gone askew that one complaint's sort of interwoven with all the others, if you get what I mean. You see, we no sooner get control of one thing than an inflammation or something starts up elsewhere, and chucks us right back to the starting point again!"

"Yes?" mused James. He was turning slightly chilly.

"Funny, you know—some of the things they've done to me. Almost make you laugh," Mr. Fowler pursued with a dreary smile. "I'll have to tell you about a few of them, Cranning. You see, primarily—that is, as nearly as I can remember now, and I've been through so much that I'm frank to say that my memory isn't very clear as to the actual beginning—it started with some sort of periostitis.

"Doctor Wold—old chap that's been fussing over me since I was a kid—couldn't seem to make much of it; he treated me for mighty near a year, and I think I must have swallowed half the pills in America. Then he gave it up, and sent me to Dr. Paul Preston—you know him?"

"No," said James. He had ceased being chilly now, and was beginning to warm unnaturally.

"Well, you've heard of him, of course. Preston's the biggest man in his particular line in this country, and a mighty fine chap, too. Quite a young chap to be so eminent—not forty yet, I'd say. And he's unlike most of 'em nowadays; he wears a pointed beard.

"What the deuce is there about a beard on a doctor that gives you the impression that he knows his business? Hanged if I know, either, Cranning, but Preston's got one, and he certainly knows his business. He put me on a special diet for two weeks—no, it was three weeks, come to think of it; I had to drop the milk part at the end of the second week, and that always mixes me up when I try to tell about it.

"Well, as I say, Preston put me on a very special diet, Cranning, and then looked me over again. Matter of fact, he had me come and live in his house, which is a sort of exclusive sanatorium, for three or four days. Preston said himself, Cranning, that I was one of the most puzzling cases he'd ever encountered.

"He wanted me to go to the Talbot Clinic, and let some one down there operate on me. Jules Ferrine, I think it was—no, it wasn't, either. It was Forrano, the Italian; I always confuse these two.

"Anyhow, I did go down, and it seemed that Forrano had doped out a trick operation for just such cases, and he'd been having wonderful luck with it. I was tempted to let him go ahead and cut. And then," said Mr. Fowler with a smile that was positively crafty, "I remembered Schlitteisen!"

"Oh!" said James hoarsely.

"You see, just that week, I'd been reading Schlitteisen's great book, his 'Zehn Auszerordentlicher—' by the way, you're familiar with Schlitteisen, of course?"

"I never heard of him."

"You never heard of Emil Schlitteisen, the great Munich specialist?" Fowler cried, quite aghast. "Why, Cranning! He's the man who operated on—"

James shut his fine teeth tight together. These many seconds, he had been trying to hope that it was not so; but it was so, fast enough; they had unloaded upon him that lowest and most dreadful form of animal life, the loquacious hypochondriac!

In the general scheme of things there were some few items James loathed; and there

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a small number which he abominated; and of these latter, blazoned in letters of flame, the hypochondriac stood at the top of his list.

From one year's end to the other, the workings of his own sound body never entered his head as food for thought, far less as material over which one might brood; and he had all possible sympathy for a really ailing human, too. Yes, and if it pleased a man or a woman to fancy himself or herself afflicted with every disease discovered and named from the dawn of medicine to the present date, that also was perfectly satisfactory to James Cranning, just so that he or she kept silent about it.

But why weak-witted legislatures insisted on classing as first degree murder the eliminating of the superbore who dwells aloud on his own symptoms, his own operations—James controlled himself with a great, wrenching effort. After all, the creature was Alice's husband and Alice was Dot's dearest friend; and in any case, he was a guest, and it might seem queer to the neighbors were James to take the flat of his heavy shovel, and definitely put Mr. Fowler out of his misery!

Which was all rot, of course, but it surely did beat Hades that on this afternoon of all afternoons, when James was on edge from the tips of his toes to the crown of his head, he must be handcuffed to his pet aversion.

Gracefully, for he had now hit his stride in earnest, Mr. Fowler detailed the manner in which Simon Bark, the plastic surgeon, had taken him to a sanatorium, and presumably turned him inside out without result. Enthusiastically, Mr. Fowler passed to his trip abroad, two years ago, which had been made for the purpose of interviewing Sir Lester Wimmet, than whom it appeared there was none more eminent.

Next, he recounted the sorry day whereupon he had called in one Dr. Griggs Samson and—oh! Oh! James found a box, and with another terrible effort sat down, and forced himself to count the blades of grass which hung over the edge of the path. He could not speak, nor was it at all necessary that he speak.

Ten thousand years later—it may have been a little less than that, although Mr. Cranning believed it to be rather more—they were summoned to Dorothy's table, all a-glitter with glass and silver. James heaved one great sigh of relief; a mistaken sigh, however, for Mr. Fowler proved at once that he could sing of his erring economy quite as well at table as elsewhere. Dorothy, James noted dizzily, seemed rather puzzled, rather annoyed; but Alice beamed warm sympathy at him she had married.

Now he had passed to the terrific little period when all hands had agreed that he was suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis, a conclusion which Fowler himself had known as faulty in the very beginning. He spoke dramatically of his days in Saranac; he spoke sneeringly of one physician at that resort, glowingly of another who eventually confirmed his own opinion that in all probability the real root of the trouble was an obscure complication in the gall-sac!

James munched and, internally, moaned. Although he wasn't going to stand much more of this. Nix! If he had to punch Fowler, just for a change, or set fire to the house, he wasn't going to stand much more of this! Why, all over him the skin was literally crawling!

"Let's wash dishes," Alice cried prettily after another eternity, and beamed at her husband. "How do you feel, sweetheart?"

"Eh? Oh, as well as ever," Mr. Fowler sighed, pausing annoyedly.

"Wouldn't you like to go out in the air again with Jimmy?"

"We'll—we'll go out on the veranda," mouthed Mr. Cranning.

Again Alice beamed, unsmilingly this time, though.

"Did you tell Jimmy about Dr. Snifton, in Boston?" she asked.

"Not yet."

"Tell him. I want to know what you think of the way that man acted, Jimmy. I think he was perfectly awful!"

She fluttered out with a handful of plates. James—ha! Fowler 'd linked arms with him, so that he couldn't escape, eh?—escorted his guest to the veranda.

And his guest, with apologies, postponed the matter of Dr. Snifton for a little, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

passed to the strange story of Dr. Milford Roach, who—

And so he went on—and on—and on. And it was only a few minutes past one o'clock, whereas James had fondly fancied that twilight must be approaching. Well—say.

He'd be damned if he'd stand any more of this! He might be a bit abnormal himself this day, but that was no reason for suffering any more of Fowler's maunderings. Guest or no guest, he'd tell Fowler exactly what a blasted fool James considered him.

James, indeed, was just about to turn and begin this astonishing speech when Dorothy appeared, her arm about Alice. Dorothy was looking at him with odd, quizzical eyes, as if investigating the inner recesses of James's brain.

"We'd like to take a nice long ride this afternoon," she said.

"You would? Well, so would I," James cried, and leaped from his chair.

"And so I thought, maybe, Jimmy, you'd walk down to the garage, and see if—er—Fred has the car all fixed and ready. Yes?"

Flittingly, the good old principles presented themselves for James's consideration—only flittingly. This was no afternoon for good old principles, or anything else but escape. Not that he hated any less to ask for the Budlong car, to be sure, but as between asking and remaining here to blast a lifelong friendship of Dorothy's, the asking bade fair to be pure delight.

"Yes, I'll go," said James.

"I'll stroll along with you," said Mr. Fowler. "I want to tell you—"

"No. You stay here," cried his host as he snatched his hat. "It's too hot for you down there. Hottest part of town and—bye, bye."

He strode away, breathing deeply of the sweet suburban air. Once around the corner, he even smiled. Mr. Fowler and his complete compendium of complaints would occupy the back seat with his wife. You bet your life he'd occupy the back seat, if James had to pick him up, and throw him there.

And old Fred Budlong wouldn't mind lending his car. In truth, even if he had dared to be engaged to Dorothy for a couple of weeks, Fred was the best old soul in the world—tall, fat, easy-going, good natured to the point of somnolence. He was prosperous; there wasn't a nerve in his body. He had no interests in life save his wife and his business. Aye, a good old scout.

As for his wife—well, James didn't give a rap about her, one way or the other. Perhaps her great, black eyes did roll too much; perhaps, if neither stage nor movies had ever invented the vamp type, Irma would not have worn her hair in just that sleek, dangerous looking way.

She was mighty pretty, of course; but for James's taste she was too skinny and slithery; and they were friends, but James was on just as good terms, on just the same terms, with any one of a dozen other of Sunnyvale's young matrons. That and no more, no matter what Dorothy might think to the contrary!

And here was the big, beautiful stucco Budlong house, with all its trick Japanese shrubbery, and its drive winding to the garage at the rear. James grinned, and rang the bell—and waited. Fred was upstairs asleep, this Saturday afternoon. Martha, the colored cook, might well be slumbering on the back porch, for Irma would be playing bridge up here or down in the city, and—

"Oh, hello, Irma!" James said in some astonishment.

"Why, Jimmy!" cried Irma softly, delightedly, and her eyes caressed James Cranning. "Why, you good for nothing, reckless boy! Jimmy, come in, please. I'm sure that old Harkness cat is watching from behind her curtain, across the street." And then, as James entered: "Jimmy, how did you know that I was all alone?"

"I didn't," James stated, and queer little shivers ran uneasily through him.

Mrs. Fred Budlong smiled up at him, tender in her skepticism; tenderly, too, did she touch James's strong arm with her slim little hand, just as she had touched it several times before. The fact remains, you see, that once upon a time that pallid, washed-out little Dorothy had so ensnared this lady's husband that he had found him-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

self trapped into a proposal. Real forgiveness for a trick like that is all but impossible.

Now James was drifting into the living room with her—a queer, shadowy place, faintly perfumed. Now he was sitting beside her on the couch, her hand through his arm, and she was leaning against him. James swallowed.

"Well, whether you knew it or not, I am," smiled Irma, "and I'm glad you came. I was horribly lonely, Jimmy."

"Where's Fred?"

"At his office. He won't be up from the city till eight or nine."

"Where—where's Martha?"

"The cook? She's gone. They're sending me another on Tuesday," murmured Irma, and threw back her head, and laughed very softly. James looked at her. Had he been some one else, or had he been himself and a little less in love with Dorothy, he would have kissed her now. If that wasn't what she was expecting, he'd eat all the furniture in this room and—well, at any rate, she had finished her laugh ten inches farther away from him, which was a mercy.

"You're such a dear, funny boy," she told James.

"I don't—er—mean to be," he muttered. "I came over to—"

"I see that you did. How did you escape from Dot?"

"Eh?"

"She's jealous!"

"See here, Irma!" James said firmly. "Don't be silly! Of course, if I'd known you were alone, I—er—I'd probably have asked Dorothy to come, because this Sunnyvale's a darned small place."

"And every one in it is as stuffy and proper as you think you are," the girl laughed delightedly. "But I'm glad you came, if it's only for two or three hours and—Jimmy, will you please stop fidgeting like that?"

She laid fine, firm little hands on James, and sat him down again. She smiled entrancingly, and James relaxed. Indeed, what else was there to do? This girl was a lovely, high-keyed creature, inexcusably left alone just now; further, James had come to ask a favor of some magnitude, and one really does not lead up to such a thing by offending one's hostess.

"That's better," said Irma. "Now I want to tell you all my troubles. Jimmy, about those fancy golf clubs Fred wants for his birthday, for one thing. Has he told you about them?"

"Oh, yes."

"And where to get them?"

"Yes."

"Will you get them for me, and hide them in your house, Jimmy? Thanks—you're a darling! And—oh, yes, I want to work out a funny little surprise party for his birthday, and you can help me with that. Here's what I thought of doing—"

Unquestionably, time was passing. More and more of it passed while Irma told James what she thought of doing. There was nothing unpleasant about listening to Irma, but time was passing. And there was that other uncomfortable angle, too.

James, he assured himself, was not the sort of ass who fancies all women infatuated with him; but there were times when, looking into Irma's wonderful eyes, James knew a certain terror. Fred was a sleepy soul, given to taking things for granted; they had been married two years now, and long before this he had taken Irma for granted. Well, women of this steel-spring type may be safely beaten by the man they love, but they may be taken for granted only with the most disastrous results, and—

"You're not even listening," said Irma.

"Irma, I'm going to be honest with you," James said suddenly.

"Oh!" breathed Irma, plainly startled.

"I'm going to tell you why I came over here, and—"

"Jimmy!" Mrs. Fred Budlong said, warningly.

"I came to borrow your car."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Budlong differently.

"I know it's an awful piece of nerve, and there'll be no hard feelings if you say no. But Dot has some friends up who are hard to entertain, and I thought it 'd be a relief to get 'em out, and— You don't want to lend it to me, do you?" Mr. Cranning said suddenly, and grinned. "All right."

"No, Jimmy, it isn't that. I'd lend you

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just about anything—well, you can have the fool car, of course. Did I look as if I didn't want you to have it? That was because Fred acts so oddly about this particular car.

"He's had cars and cars, you know, and he never seemed to pay much attention to any of them, just so they were running. But this thing—why, he seems to be more finicky about it than he is about his head. Or his wife, Jimmy! He doesn't want a soul to go near it. He won't let me drive it—he even wants me to sit on the back seat."

"Well, I had no idea of that," James protested. "I wouldn't touch the thing for a million dollars, if that's the way he feels about it. I—"

"Piffle, Jimmy! Piffle!" laughed Mrs. Budlong. "You're ten times as good a driver as Fred, and if you want it, you're going to have it!"

"No! I—"

Some two or three seconds, Irma laid her hands upon his shoulders, and looked up and, as it were, coruscated for James.

"Do you want me to drive that car around, and leave it in front of your door?" she asked. "If you want it, you're going to have it, Jimmy! And if you're back before eight, Fred will never even know it has been out, unless some of the neighbors tell him—and he doesn't speak to a neighbor once a month— Where's that ignition key?"

She turned away, and cast about swiftly; she nodded and reached into a squat blue vase.

"Here it is. And the garage is unlocked," she said, and looked up at him again. "Only—Jimmy—"

"Yes?"

"Well—would you rather stay here with me, all by our little cozy lonelies, or drive those darned people around?" He seemed to be more than Irma could resist, as she played with the top button of James's coat.

"Well, it—it isn't always what we'd rather do, Irma," James submitted softly, for surely this lady deserved something. And, in any case, there was nobody around to hear.

"No—is it?" Irma sighed; and then swiftly she patted his cheek, and smiled up at him. Next she linked arms with him again, and so led him through dining room and kitchen to the back porch; and there, apparently, it pleased her to suspect that James's farewell might be a trifle too affectionate, for she pushed him gently outward, and whispered:

"Now, go!"

CHAPTER III.

ROLLING.

YOUNG Mr. Cranning sighed as he stepped into the Budlong car. It was a pippin, fast enough! Nineteen hundred and some odd dollars Fred had paid for the thing, and it looked more like four thousand.

James shared Mr. Budlong's preference for the open type; well, here it was in perfection and, if by some odd chance things could have gone only decently well, a couple of months hence James himself would have bought one of these. Only in dark blue; he didn't care so much for this deep gray the company featured.

He started the engine, and let in the clutch. Another sigh, which was one of delight, and James rolled out of Mr. Fred Budlong's garage, down Mr. Budlong's drive, past the waving hand of Mr. Budlong's wife, behind the curtain, and so away from all that was Mr. Budlong's.

Ah! And why was Dot waiting out by the curb? Obviously she was waiting for the husband who now cried gayly:

"Here we are!"

"Oh, I was so frightened!" said Dorothy. "I thought you'd been in a smash! You've been gone so long. What did Fred say?"

"He didn't say a thing," grinned James. "He wasn't there."

"And you took his car without even asking?" Mrs. Cranning gasped.

"I asked Irma."

"Irma?" cried Dorothy, and frowned inquiringly at her husband. "Well, I suppose it's all right, but I do wish Fred had been—Jim, was Irma alone?"

"Except for myself, she was."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dorothy came nearer. Her lovely eyes were wider, her gaze was warmer.

"Jimmy, just why was it necessary for you to stay more than one hour and talk to Irma?"

"I came back as soon as I could get away decently, Dot. I couldn't very well stick my head in the door, yell at her that I was going to take her car, and do it. There is such a thing as decency, honey."

"Yes, I'm quite aware of that, Jimmy! That's exactly why I'm trying to find out why you had to stay over an hour to—wasn't the cook there?"

"She'd left!"

"Then what were you doing?" Mrs. Cranning hissed.

"Talking, of course, and—"

"Why don't you look at me?"

"Dammit! I am looking at you, Dot!" James exploded.

"Don't shriek and swear. And don't glare so brazenly; it's not convincing!"

"All right! Then don't ask such fool—"

"Oh! We're not to be quizzed at all?"

"No, we're not," said James, "because there's nothing to be quizzed about. I didn't suggest borrowing this thing, honey; I only went after it because your friend's nut husband drove me to it—and you wanted me to do it. So please don't—"

"Ask you to explain too much, perhaps?"

"I was going to say, please don't be so ready for battle because the job took a few minutes longer than you expected!"

"Battle? I'm not ready for battle!" Mrs. Cranning responded furiously. "But it is my right to know just why—"

"Go ask Irma!" snapped James.

Pretty Mrs. Cranning recoiled as if before an actual blow; a bright patch of red appeared on either cheek, and her indrawn breath whistled in a thin, peculiar way.

"That sounds downright abandoned!" she exclaimed.

"Ooo-hoo!" Alice's shrill voice cried from the veranda. "There you are at last!"

Eternally unaccountable is woman. Dorothy turned from her husband, and to her friend; and in the little space occupied by this turning she had learned again how to smile.

"Here he is!" she cried happily. "We'll get our coats and start now."

So there, for the time being at any rate, was an end of the nonsense. James scowled darkly ahead, and waited. The girls were chattering again as they locked the house; now they were escorting the professional invalid down the path—and James threw open the back door and said:

"You and Alice get in back, Fowler, and—"

"Oh, he can't ride in the back!" Alice cried.

"Why can't he?" James inquired.

"Too much wind, Jimmy. He really does catch cold so easily, you know, and the specialist who treats all his colds is in Europe till November. No, you take Harry up there with you!"

"Yes!" said Harry, as he climbed in; and he gazed pensively at James with, "What was I saying when they started you off for the car? Oh, yes; about Dr. Pilring in Chicago; about the day I fainted in the store in Randolph Street. I remember now! Well, Cranning, believe it or not, when I came around again—"

He was launched once more!

Several seconds James considered him in a chilled, terrified way. There would be no stopping him now until they reached the lonely spots, where one could open the cut-out. Again James Cranning shut his teeth as he drove away.

Still, driving a car like this was ever a joy to James, and when they had turned the next corner and covered the three blocks to the State road, he found that traffic, for a clear Saturday, was pleasantly thin to-day. He tried a little speed, and discovered that Mr. Fowler could not talk nearly so well at forty-five miles an hour.

He smiled as the gentleman at last grew hoarse, and brought the pace to fifty miles. And this was the car that could do it, too! This thing seemed to have more spare power tucked away under the hood than any racing car. James really grinned.

An hour, and the suburban district was far behind, and he was looking for one of his pet dirt roads into which to turn. Another hour and he had brought them to mountainous country, and was chuckling

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

over Mr. Fowler, and still marveling at the dogged persistence with which the man continued his story. And then—

"Will you please, please slow down?" Dorothy seemed to be shrieking.

"Of course," said James, and did.

"Because we've been trying to tell you for the last ten miles that Allie wants to pick some wildflowers," Dorothy said quite viciously.

"She does? Fine!" James beamed as he stopped at the side of the deserted road. "There's a whole conservatory down there. I'll help her!"

"You stay here, and keep me from being lonely," Dorothy said sweetly. "Harry can help Alice."

That person, with a sigh and a tentative shiver or two, was climbing out. And now he was helping his wife down the bank, and James turned to beam at his wife in the usual affectionate way. He found her smiling tartly.

"Getting to be quite the ladies' man, aren't you?" she asked. "Alice is robust enough to gather her own flowers."

"Why, I—I thought only—"

"And another thing, Jimmy; it was perfectly brutal of you to drive like that with a sick man in the car. Just because Alice prefers to go like mad is no real reason for killing her husband!"

"I didn't know she liked to go fast!"

"Tush!" said Mrs. Cranning, in this one syllable slapping her husband's face, calling him a liar, and indicating her own disgust.

James hitched around and stared.

"Say, honey," said he, "just what seems to be the trouble? It isn't possible that even you think that I'm falling in love with that snippy little rat?"

One instant Dorothy's eyes flashed at him; they were then lowered.

"No!"

"Well?"

"Well?" demanded Mrs. Cranning.

"You're not still sore because I didn't whack Irma with a blackjack, and carry off her car inside of two minutes?"

"It's not her car. It's Fred's. And you're coarse!"

"I'm a hard-boiled guy, Dot," James grinned. "But it's not that?"

"Of course it is!"

"Well, please let me say, then, that—"

Dorothy waved a protesting hand at him.

"No! Please do not! Because I feel that it wouldn't be the truth—and I want the truth!"

"About what?"

"About why you had to spend an hour with Irma!"

A good-natured being was James Cranning, and very slow to wrath. But now he threw up his own hands, and flushed angrily.

"Hells bells!" he cried, profanely enough. "Do you want me to be still more hard boiled, and come right out as—as if I was somebody in a modern play, and tell you in so many words that I positively—"

"Jimmy!" cried his wife. "Don't be indecent!"

"Who wants to be indecent? I don't!" James grunted. "Only you stop being ridiculous!"

Mrs. Cranning's eyes flashed.

"At least, I'm not that!"

"Oh, yes, you are! And what's more—"

"Oh, no, I'm not!" the lady insisted. "I see a great many things that you never think I see, Jimmy. Of course, Irma's attractive in a cheap way—extremely attractive. If you like the type. And you do!"

"But—"

"And Fred's such a dear, good, sleepy soul that he'd never suspect!"

"Say, why is Fred so darned good?" James hurled at his wife.

"Because he is! And you know that he is! And—"

"Woman, you listen to me!" young Mr. Cranning interrupted. "If you'd have a little more faith in your own husband, and a little less in the husbands of all these other ladies, things would be a lot pleasanter around our house!"

Mrs. Cranning raised her brows.

"Don't evade the main issue, please. What I wanted to say is this: if you really find Irma so very fascinating, I'd be the very last one to stand in your way, Jim, or to—to wish to compete, you know. If you'd only just be perfectly honest with me, I'd step aside gladly and—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Wait a minute before you step!" James broke in, in the same impolite way. "I'm getting sick and tired and disgusted with all this nit-wit stuff, Dorothy. And some day soon—and you remember that I said this!—I'm going to be sick enough of it to do something desperate."

His young countenance was purple, too. There is no denying that James was, as the saying goes, mad all the way through. Mrs. Cranning regarded him with eyes abruptly grown round again.

"D-desperate?" she echoed with not nearly so much force. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean exactly what I say: something desperate, kid—and I don't mean maybe about that, either!" James banged out. "Something that 'll settle this infernal poppycock for good and all, Dot! Something that 'll put the eternal kibosh on all your fool—"

"Jimmy!" gasped his wife.

"What?"

"I—I didn't mean—"

"Pardon me, but you did! And you do! And what's more, Dorothy, you take it straight from me that—"

"Hush, Jimmy—they're coming! Please hush!" Mrs. Cranning cried. "Jimmy dear, I never—ssh! They'll hear us!"

"Let 'em!" snarled James from the corner of his mouth.

Nor did his black rage diminish one whit before the very scared effect that was coming to Dorothy. James Cranning smiled a smile such as might have appeared on the face of one of Sir Henry Morgan's bloodier underlings; and still, so firmly are the good old conventions intrenched in most of us, within another two seconds he had contrived to make this a perfectly ordinary Saturday afternoon motoring smile for the benefit of the returning couple.

"Got all you want?" James cried heartily.

It appeared that they had. James caused the smile to become even more natural.

"I'm going to take you up through Hinchton now," he said. "Never heard of Hinchton, eh? Well, it's there all right, and it's one of our pet roads, folks. Once you're in our particular nook, you'll think you're a thousand miles from anywhere. Yep—fact! I don't believe three cars a week go over that road. There's a steep bank and a sort of gorge with a deep little river at the bottom. It's great!"

"I got the very devil of a cold three years ago, swimming in a deep little river," Mr. Fowler stated as he tucked himself into place.

"Keep out of this one, then," James said briefly.

"I shall, never fear. Don't go in swimming, as a rule, except in a warmed pool once in awhile, but this time there were several fellows, and they insisted that I go in with them. Well, I did, Cranning, rather than be unpleasant, you know, and—I give you my word—I hadn't been in the water two minutes before I began to shake! Well—"

It was queer, of course, but James did not seem nearly so able to bear the creature as he had been before that little passage with Dorothy.

He'd been a bundle of overstrained nerves, and all that, of course; but now he was just a shrieking mass of uncontrollability, if that was what one called it. Something of the kind, at any rate. Savagely he yearned to whirl about, driving with one hand, and to seize Mr. Fowler's doubtless ailing throat with the other, and so to jam Mr. Fowler's head against the back of the seat.

And further, he yearned to scream at Mr. Fowler all those assorted, lurid sentiments which had accumulated inside James during the day—aye, to scream and screech and roar at the being until it cowered away from him, frantically protesting that never a single symptom should be hurled at James from this moment onward.

Well, this wouldn't do at all! James shook himself together quite abruptly. This accursed Fowler was making him so infernally nervous that it affected his driving. Twice he had whizzed over spots that demanded easier going. Although maybe this was a sort of hunch? Maybe he could jounce the endless flow of words into oblivion by hitting some of the rough places? There were plenty of them in this road. James tried a few.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It seemed to make little or no difference to Mr. Fowler. He was almost rapt just at present in his enthusiasm over the one genuine operation somebody had performed on him. He braced himself and found a firmer hold for his feet; he clutched the back of the seat—and shouted on.

"J-Jimmy!" Dorothy called, and there was repentance in her tone.

"What?" James hurled back over his shoulder.

"Do we have to go quite so fast?"

"We do, if these people are going to see Hinchton and then get back to town on the seven fifty."

"But perhaps—"

"I can't talk to you and drive at the same time, Dot!" James shouted. "I'm sorry, but I can't."

"But you're driving recklessly, Jimmy!"

One fleeting moment James turned and smiled.

"Ha!" he laughed quite blood-curdlingly.

"Jimmy dear! Please!" Dorothy cried piteously. "I—didn't mean to—"

"Honey, you'll have to keep your hands off me!" James said with exceeding crispness. "I need all my attention for this road."

And now, behind him, there was a tremulous sigh, and Dorothy settled back once more in a slightly chastened frame of mind, perchance, and that was well.

This jealousy of Dot's had been grating more and more of late on one who was perhaps the most faithful husband alive. At present his burst of righteous anger appeared to have had its effect. Dot, back there, seemed of the impression that he was really about to do something desperate. Right here was a splendid bowlder, too, jutting out into the road—a trip over that ought to add to the effect, and, incidentally, to jounce the seven senses out of Fowler.

James bounced over the edge of this bowlder, causing the car to rock in quite startling fashion.

"My Lord, Cranning!" gasped his guest.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Please!" cried his own wife.

James smiled again; but it might be as well to let it go at that, and charge no more rock formations. With his finances what they were just now, he had no real desire to break a set of springs for Fred Budlong, and so pile up a fifty-dollar repair bill for himself.

And possibly, if it came right down to facts, mused James—for he was no more bounce proof than the rest of them—most of the trouble was inside himself. He had done a lot of fuming over this Mannering deal; he had been doing little sleeping; he was by no means the genial young man of a month ago.

Little things irritated him in a fashion out of all proportion to their real importance. Witness the recent blast at Dorothy, and the murderous way he was thinking of Fowler.

Good enough, then! It were as well for James Cranning to recapture himself, and drag himself down to earth once more, and, generally speaking, to behave himself. Mr. Cranning gripped his wheel and stared straight ahead in soothing contemplation of the beautiful stretch of country.

They had passed the small abandoned farm that was one of his landmarks in this desolate region; they had turned into the decrepit gateway of the very large abandoned farm that lay beyond. Now they were negotiating the rough road through the woods on the latter farm; and when they had topped the steep rise up which they were now speeding the scenic gem would burst upon them—the rocky field dropping away beyond the rail fence at the right to the gorgelike bed of the deep and noisy little river down below.

Over the ridge one descended for perhaps a hundred feet and then stopped one's car, that the guests might exclaim at the lovely wilderness, and state, as they always did, that it looked more like Rocky Mountain country than like Connecticut, that they might ask James how he had ever discovered this exquisite spot.

Mr. Cranning sighed. He knew that conversation, almost word for word. He pushed down on the gas, to go over the ridge in fitting style, and—wow! He'd given her a bit too much, had he not? The

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fred Budlong car, with its apparently limitless supply of power, had bounced over the top and now was hurtling downward again before he could get to the brake.

Dorothy, poor kid, was shrieking again. However, whether Dorothy realized it or not, her husband's foot was on the brake now. In another fifty feet or thereabout they'd glide to a reassuring standstill and— Well, what was that?

Young Mr. Cranning's head was thrust forward and he squinted hard. Yes, it was a devilish little woodchuck, camped squarely in the wheel track, and not thirty feet ahead. Nor did it appear that this woodchuck, staring his warranted astonishment at the intruders, had any idea of surrendering his place. James loved animals, too, were they wild or tame. Once upon a time he had run over a dog, and the sickishness of it had lingered with him for months.

And now this infernal little beast was begging James for a ticket of admission to the woodchuck heaven, and—ugh!

In the thousandth part of a second Mr. Cranning surveyed the space between road and rail fence. Mercifully, there was no ditch, so he'd have to swing out to the right a foot or so, and take the chance of the little fellow's remaining just as he was until the car had passed. So James held his breath and twisted very sharply to the right; and he would have twisted just as sharply to the left again in another instant, but that some inexplicable thing was happening.

Bumping, plunging, sliding, they were whizzing straight at the rail fence. They—great Scott! The fence had exploded. It could be nothing else, you see; a thousand bits of rail flared up before James, and all about James. There was a loud crack as one fragment met the windshield.

Fowler was screaming in terror. So, for that matter, were Alice and little Dot. But James himself did not scream. One on top of the other, dumfounding impressions were crashing into James's brain with such speed, with such terrific force, that to save his very life he could not have uttered one solitary word or sound just then.

Now the car was pointing straight downhill and making, bullet fashion, for the big rock in the center of the field. And now, by all that was impossible, the field itself was rising, as a single plane, at his right, just as if some giant hand had been slipped beneath its farther edge, had picked it up, and now was hurling it at Fred Budlong's car.

This phenomenon James could not grasp. Another, though, he did grasp with uncanny readiness: the automobile was just about to turn over!

CHAPTER IV.

THE GAY AFTERWARD.

EVENTS seemed to be piling themselves upon James Cranning much too rapidly to allow of intelligent study or classification. One by one he merely sensed these events, losing each before the onrush of the violent next.

There were screams, he knew, and there was a mighty crash, somehow suggesting that an office building had fallen upon the car. Then night came on suddenly, and millions of stars flashed before James—and as swiftly disappeared, leaving him with the silliest idea that he was a cork which had been pushed under water, and had bobbed up again.

At any rate, he was still gripping the wheel with iron fingers, and—no, he wasn't gripping it at all, was he? Once more the undependable field was rising up on edge, and James, who had never contemplated anything so absurd, abruptly spread his wings, and flew out of the car!

He was, he inferred, flying out to meet the field. He was going to meet it head-on, too, he noted in the next rather delirious instant. He tried to swerve in his flight, and found that steering apparatus had not been vouchsafed him when he acquired the wings. So—

After a time James sat up and looked about giddily.

For some reason he still lived. This was funny. James laughed. At once, though, he ceased laughing. He—he hadn't been alone in that car when—whatever it was—took place! He had taken a chance and, because the Budlong machinery was new

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and rather stiff, he had missed out entirely; and to save the skin of a wretched little woodchuck James had killed his own Dorothy!

Gasping, he staggered wildly to his feet. He knew exactly what he meant to do. He'd find what remained of the poor little kid, and make sure. Then he'd run down to the deep pool at the bottom of this steep field, and into it; and on the rocky bed he would lie until his soul went out, and meet Dorothy's! It was an ideal pool for this purpose, too; James knew, because one day last summer he had gone in swimming there, and it was all of nine feet deep!

So now—

"Jimmy! My Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy, you're not hurt! You're not hurt!" Dorothy herself gasped.

"Well, there, there!" said James thickly. "You'd better sit down, kid."

"I'm not going to faint, Jimmy," Dorothy assured him, and then grew whiter and whiter. "Jimmy! The others!"

"Why—why, gosh, Dot!" faltered the punctilious host of the party, and did a bit of blanching on his own account. "I'd forgotten that there were any others!"

"You and I were thrown clear, Jimmy. I think the car turned over twice, and you went out on the second turn. I—I saw you duck down the first time, and—I think I felt myself going, and relaxed, and I'm not even bruised. But Harry and Alice didn't relax! They were clawing and clutching at everything in sight, and they must have been—been—"

Words, naturally enough, failed the distressed young woman. She covered her eyes, and shuddered.

"And, Jimmy, I'm responsible for—"

Young Mr. Cranning, however, gripped her arm, and pointed.

"L-l-look!" he chattered. "Over there! That's Alice, Dot! See—she isn't dead, either! She's sitting up now, and—and moving!"

Mrs. Cranning, even then, was speeding toward whatever might remain of her dear friend. James followed, as swiftly as might be, and with not a little wonder at finding himself able to follow at all. Whatever their extent, he found himself able to disregard his own hurts for the present. He gazed down upon Alice, who was still sitting in the same spot.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Fowler vaguely. "Oh! Oh!"

"Where are you hurt?" Dorothy gasped out as she dropped to her knees.

"What?" said Alice, and regarded her rather annoyedly. "I'm not hurt—that is, I think I'm not. I've been trying—arms, and legs, and head, you know, and my neck. They all seem to work. But I—oh, I—rolled over so many, many times!"

"Can you stand, Alice?" James asked.

"If you'll help me," Mrs. Fowler murmured; and she did stand, too, in the most satisfactory way, swaying only slightly for a moment, and then becoming fairly steady. "He—Harry? Harry's—all right?"

"He—oh—he—" James stammered.

"Isn't he all right?" Alice screamed.

James did not answer at once. In a way, of course, it was slightly embarrassing to realize that for the moment he had forgotten the very existence of this woman's husband. He turned away, and Alice Fowler, studying his profile for an instant, appeared to read the very worst.

A dreadful shaking gasp escaped her; her thin hands clasped to her thin, young bosom; and down that still, secluded glen rang a shriek of human agony undiluted, a shriek so terrible, that James's blood congealed in his veins!

"My Harry!" was the burden of this shriek. "My Harry!"

Dorothy moaned; she would have taken the stricken girl in her arms, but that Alice thrust her aside, and screamed again. Mr. Cranning shut his teeth tight, lest he, too, echo the scream. Alice waved wild, aimless hands—and even as she waved them, there floated from a distance a thin, croaking:

"Al-ice! Al-lie!"

Did they start at this sound? They did indeed, and, as one person, they whirled about to face the direction from which the sound had come. And there, scarcely twenty yards away, lay Harry Fowler. Flat upon his back he was, and altogether motionless. He was greenish of complexion; he was gasping out what certainly sounded as if they might be his last few gasps.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Seconds only, and they had reached Harry's side; and there they crouched beside the unfortunate man, and James Cranning, at least, choked and tried in vain to drag his eyes from the gruesome sight.

Not that Mr. Fowler was bathed in gore, or that bits of bone were sticking out in plain sight, of course; so far as that went, but that one sleeve of his coat was torn, and the rest of him pretty well decorated with grass stains, he seemed almost as good as new. It was the hair-raising something in his expression which caused James to choke—that and his own conscience.

Ten minutes ago James had been thinking most harshly of this poor devil, and had been wishing him all manner of evil. Well, now looking at him as he lay there, cut down in his youth, James would gladly have given his own life to see the man restored.

"Alice!" Fowler said, with difficulty.

"Dearest! Dearest!" Alice wailed. "You're hurt!"

"Badly!" the professional sick man agreed at once; and then, as she would have raised his head, he shook that member in weak protest. "No! No! Don't touch me!" he gasped. "Moving me might—finish me!"

"But where are you hurt? Where? Where? Where?"

Mr. Fowler smiled up faintly, resignedly, at his wife. It was a really beautiful expression—a noble sort of smile which bespoke patient suffering of the kind only a strong man knows how to bear. It hinted, too, at forgiveness for all the world.

"My back!" he whispered.

"Oh!" cried Alice.

"Broken!" Mr. Fowler proclaimed quite loudly.

"Oh!" screamed his wife.

"Yes—spinal column, darling. Fractured in—the accident," Mr. Fowler repeated. "Can't move—a muscle!"

Only after a tremendous struggle did Mrs. Fowler control herself to some extent; her poor little teeth rattled as she looked up at James.

"Get a doctor!" she choked out. "Don't stand there gaping, Jimmy! Go to a farmhouse where they have a telephone, and—oh, there must be a village and a doctor that you can reach, and—oh, run! Run!"

"I—you bet your life I'll run!" James responded as he arose. "I know where there's a house with—"

"Oh—Cranning," Mr. Fowler croaked.

"Yes, old man?" James said brokenly.

"No—use, you know," the sufferer explained, and somehow the nobility of his smile seemed to increase. "Not many—more minutes!"

"Nonsense!" James gulped.

"No," Fowler smiled. "A man—knows."

"But maybe your back isn't really broken. Maybe you're just sort of shell-shocked, without the shells, you know," James submitted crazily. "Maybe it isn't as bad as you—"

"Pardon me, Cranning, but when a man's back is broken, it's broken; and he isn't in any doubt about it," Mr. Fowler corrected with some indignation. "This back of mine is broken."

"Jimmy, won't you please go for a doctor?" Alice pleaded.

"I want to. He said—"

"No, let him stay here," Mr. Fowler insisted less energetically, and smiled once more. "I want to say—Cranning, that I—forgive you for—all this. All too bad, but—keep an eye on Alice, will you, Cranning? She's just a little kid!"

James, nodding, had quite passed beyond words. Dorothy could not choke back her sob. Alice closed her eyes, and trembled.

"Alice," said her husband.

"Yes? Yes?"

"Will you—hold my hand, darling?"

Alice held his hand in both her own. Mr. Fowler's smile grew more serene.

"Everything's—getting dark, sort of," he whispered.

"Oh, my Lord! Oh, my Lord!" James Cranning whimpered, for he had never before seen just this.

"Dark!" whispered Mr. Fowler, and James's burning eyes grew faintly amazed. Nonsense, of course, but he could have sworn that there was a lot of satisfaction in that word. It was exactly as if the man was enjoying himself. What a blamed fool he was, to imagine a thing like that, with Alice whining and moaning, and the poor

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wretch himself going out and—James shut his eyes tight.

And then he opened them, for Dorothy was speaking with much crispness and decision.

"We'll have to move him," she said.

"We can't."

"We can't let him lie there, and burn to death," Mrs. Cranning replied, astonishingly. "Look, Jim—the fire!"

James looked, and then stared hard in new amazement. Really, the number of things one could fail to observe in a moment like this was almost beyond belief. There was indeed a fire! All that remained of Fred Budlong's beautiful new car had caught on the edge of a rock, a dozen yards above them—had caught just by the corner of its bent frame, and now was hanging precariously, as if waiting for the smallest push to send it on its downhill way.

And it was burning merrily, too. Somewhere in the smash, James deduced, the gasoline tank had been shattered; now from end to end of the blazing ruin great bursts of smoky flame were rising. Top, woodwork, upholstery, all were going together; nor was that all, by any manner of means. In three separate spots, burning gasoline was trickling down the hillside, and of these three streams the largest was making directly for Harry Fowler.

"I'm mighty sorry, old man," James said as he bent over the sufferer. "We'll have to move you."

"I tell you, no! You can't! You'll—"

"Well, look for yourself," said James, and pointed.

With a visible effort, Mr. Fowler turned his head, and gazed upward; and in an instant his eyes and mouth had opened together, and he was gazing at a fiery little rivulet not twenty feet away. And in another instant, the dying man had bounced to his feet with rather the effect of a circus acrobat.

"Alice! Alice!" he shouted as he started at top speed in a general northerly direction. "Look out!"

"Well—wait!" James roared, for he was witnessing a miracle for the first time. "Your back, Fowler! Your—"

"Damn my back!" the astonishing gentleman panted as he halted two hundred feet away. "Alice! Come here! That thing's going to blow up!"

The dutiful Alice stumbled after him. Neither James nor his wife followed just then. They were staring at Fred Budlong's vanishing car; it may be, too, that they were thinking quite actively about this car, and its connection with themselves; but they did not speak.

The ill-starred motor was volatilizing with astonishing rapidity. Flames which a minute or two ago had been shooting skyward were lower now. Fumes of burning grease, and leather, and rubber, and wood hung pungently upon the lately sweet air. What had once been beautiful upholstery was now only a mass of curling, sizzling fragments; where once had been rounded and polished woodwork, there was now only a gaunt steel skeleton.

The spare tire on the rear burned through at last, and released its air with a sickening swish. A vacuum bottle, relic of some recent Budlong excursion, rolled into sight from nowhere in particular, distorted and cherry-red, blew up with a vigorous pop, and scattered what looked like hot coffee over a little area.

Aha! And now some part of the cooling system, up in front of the wrecked engine, had discovered that it, too, could explode—and so it had exploded, and there was much steam on the air for a moment. Even when a fragment of steel passed within an inch of his ear, James failed to move. He wondered, in the queer and befuddled way that was upon him now, just what else there was to explode.

"Jimmy!"

"Yes?"

"Isn't it a good thing Fred has had so many cars?"

"Why?"

"Well, you remember ours. It was part of the family, and when we had to get rid of it, it seemed like selling an old horse. But Fred has had car after car, and each one's just so much machinery, and he's no more attached to it than he'd be attached—"

"Er—yes," James interrupted softly, and started slightly. "I guess we needn't

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

discuss all that out here, Dot. You didn't want 'em to know."

Dorothy laughed bitterly.

"No, I didn't want them to know, and there's not much use in their knowing now, is there? Come away from the beastly thing, Jimmy. Something else will blow up in a minute, and you'll be hurt."

James shook his head.

"Not me—not after living through that," he said. "I want to watch it. You go over there with them."

He glanced across the field to that point where little Alice was still feeling over the structure of her husband, and evidently finding it intact. He shrugged, and gazed back at the fire, and Dorothy laid a pleading hand on his arm.

"Jimmy, please come!" she implored. "I know how reckless you can be when you're driven to it, but please don't stay here to be killed."

But James stayed and continued to watch the blaze.

Weird, was it not, how every great curse seems to have its little attendant blessing? He might be dazed just now, but he understood one thing: Dorothy had had her lesson. Aye, even if in actual fact James had not sent his borrowed car through the fence for the sole purpose of showing to what lengths an honest man may be driven by unjust accusation, the effect was every bit as good.

It was rather like overturning the Woolworth Building to get at a pair of shoe laces concealed beneath, of course, but henceforth, he fancied, little Dorothy would think twice before—hey, there!

Oh, that gentle little bang, that pretty tinkling of glass, was just a bottle exploding, was it not?

James considered the upper half of this bottle, as it returned to earth, and smiled pensively. That had contained Fred Budlong's pet brand of automobile polish, which he always carried under the rear seat. Young Mr. Cranning remembered the label perfectly: it was of a bright yellow with red lettering, and "Explosive—Keep Away from Fire" in staring type across the bottom. Well—so much for disregarding the manufacturer's instructions!

"Jimmy Cranning, you come over here with me, do you hear?" Dorothy cried, and this time caught his arm with much determination. "That whole thing's beginning to slip now, and it's coming right down this way."

James, glancing upward, obeyed quite readily. She was perfectly accurate; it was beginning to slip.

In whatever manner the ruined car had contrived to balance itself against the small bowlder, that balance had now been destroyed. Like some broken, living thing, the smoldering wreck was stirring and gliding away from its rock. A foot or so it shifted, and then paused as if to gather its waning forces. And there was a creak and a crunch, and the heavy frame came altogether clear, and turned over quite noisily.

Yes, and now it was turning over again, spattering the immediate vicinity with superheated tools, and odds and ends of metal fittings. And even again it was turning over, and this time in some uncanny fashion it managed to land in an upright position, lurching oddly on its warped and blistered steel wheels.

So, for a second, it stood and shuddered. With a creak, it glided downward then, straight for the deep pool at the bottom of the field, pitching, rattling, throwing off sparks and embers as it went. It struck another rock, and careened crazily for a moment; and it righted and clattered on again, and on—and now—

To the best of James's observing, there had been one final bounce, one final loud clattering down there by the pool. And after that, one loud splash and a violent hissing.

And then the Budlong car, not half an hour ago the prettiest vehicle one could have wished to see, was gone! That was all—just gone. It had even, as James reflected, attended to its own burial!

For no very plain reason, he raced madly after it, bringing up at the edge of the pool where once he had splashed about so merrily. He leaned over, and stared stupidly downward. There was really nothing at all to be seen, save, if one strained one's eyes, and knew just where to look, the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most indistinct suggestion of an oblong shape.

"Well—well, can you beat that?" was the most intelligent remark James found himself able to make just then.

CHAPTER V.

PARTING AND REPARATION.

FOWLER was approaching.

Fowler walked in entirely normal fashion, but his smile was an unpleasant thing to see. Just once, he, too, glanced into the pool. Then he glowered straight at James.

"Now you'll collect your insurance, and get another car, and do the same thing over again, I suppose?" he observed nastily.

"Ins—" James began in a small, sickened gasp.

"But you'll never do it over again with me," the guest assured him. "Cranning, your wife and my wife are old friends. If it wasn't for that one fact, believe me, when I tell you that I'd sue you, and keep on suing you till I'd taken the last pair of shoes from your feet!"

"Well—"

"One thing, though, I can do to you." Fowler laughed spitefully. "Cranning, if you call me for a witness to prove to your insurance company what you'll tell them happened here, I'll swear on a stack of Bibles a mile high that you were blind drunk, and wrecked your car deliberately!"

"But—"

"Because, while apparently you're not drunk, you're without any exception the craziest, rottenest driver on the face of the earth, and you've no more business in a car than I'd have firing a machine gun through the walls of an orphan asylum," said Mr. Fowler in conclusion.

James nodded his assent. Somehow or other, since he had not been killed, this Fowler person was becoming of less and less importance as other considerations of the near future crowded their way into James's mind.

"I'm sorry, Fowler," he said with commendable restraint. "Let's be thankful we're all here, and let it go at that."

Fowler laughed quite hideously.

"Yes! Let it go at that, to be sure. I've probably been injured internally; these things always develop later. Up there I was entirely paralyzed, Cranning, and at this moment nothing but an iron will is keeping me on my feet. Alice's nervous system, almost beyond question, has been shattered for life.

"She'll never be the same girl again. But because you're too infernally tough to be injured by anything short of a dynamite explosion, you're willing to let it go at that. Well, Cranning, I've seen men with nerve, but I want to say—"

James turned away.

There are things one does, and things one does not do. Having failed to kill a guest in a motor wreck, for example, one cannot satisfy the requirements of polite usage by presenting the same guest with a series of short-arm jabs. Yet some such discourtesy was lurking so close to Mr. Fowler just then that James all but grunted with the effort of turning away.

"Well—we're alive, at least," the guest was saying. "How do we get out of this God-forsaken hole?"

"I'll walk into Hinchton, and try to borrow a car," James said. "You folks stay here, and—"

"Borrow one? Why not hire one?"

"It's a little place, Fowler, and I don't know whether it has even one hacking car. But don't worry. I'll find something—"

"And drive it yourself?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, not in fifty million years will you ever drive me or my wife in another car, Cranning," the guest shouted. "I wouldn't get into a car you were driving for all the money in the world! Here! Can't we get a train to New York out of this Hinchton place?"

"No," said James. "But you ought to be able to catch the New York express from Bartlett's Junction, five miles over. It leaves about six—or it used to do that. If I can get—"

"We'll walk to Hinchton, and I'll find a car for myself," said Mr. Fowler. "Come, Alice."

So they walked to Hinchton, which lay

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some two miles beyond, over a very rough and lonely road, and it was not the very gayest ramble James could remember ever having taken. They were all rather sore and shaken. On the other hand, though—even to Mr. Fowler—they were all young and resilient.

When they had entered the moribund village, the first smile was still to be smiled among them; but at least a considerate Providence had a hacking car all ready and waiting for Mr. Fowler, an elderly vehicle driven by a hard-faced young man, who opined that he could make the junction in time by stepping on her. Mr. Fowler assisted his wife to her place.

"Good-by, Dorothy," said Mr. Fowler, ignoring James in the most boorish way. "I'm sorry for you."

"Good-by, Dot," Mrs. Fowler sniffed. "We've had a perfectly love—well, I mean—"

"Yes, I know," Dorothy sighed. "Good-by, dear. You'll—you'll come again when you get back from the West?"

"Watch us!" shrieked Mr. Fowler as he whirled about with a perfectly demoniac leer.

The old car clattered away in a cloud of dust.

And now they were back in still little Sunnyvale, James and his wife, with half past ten some minutes behind. Now they were back and alone in their little home, and so face to face with realities which they had been avoiding for several hours.

They had found another car in Hinchton after some hunting. Henry Evans, it had appeared, occasionally carried people around for hire; so they had located Henry, and had learned that they might start as soon as the carburetor was fixed, which might taken ten minutes, and actually had taken two hours. Henry, a languid man of fifty, had regretted repeatedly that the missus was not about to give them a bite to eat before they started. How little Henry had known of their desires.

Strange gayety had been theirs upon this ride, too, since they could not well discuss their problems with Henry just ahead to listen. Somewhere on a black short-cut through the wilds, a rear tire had blown out, and Henry had discovered that he had forgotten to replace the spare. And he had found his little vulcanizing kit, and his blowout patches, and had seated himself in the road in the glare of the headlights, while James had jested weirdly.

Later, the carburetor had developed a distressing cough, and begged for further treatment; and this time James had held Henry's sickly flash light until the batteries died, and then had used up his own matches one by one, jesting about this, too. Indeed, their feverish merriment had quite fascinated Henry, who was not keen of perception, and mistook it for the high spirits of youth.

But at last the carburetor had settled down to business, and Henry had put on speed—and somehow, as they neared home, the merriment had grown weaker and weaker; until, just as they were passing the Sunnyvale Methodist Church, with one more corner to turn, it had closed its poor little laughing eyes, and grown quite cold and stiff.

And now, as has been noted, they were home.

James looked about him rather incredulously. It had been such a happy little home, such a little while ago. Not overburdened with money, perhaps, but still with enough to last until the Mannering deal went through, and—he winced and looked about the hallway floor for stray telegrams. There were none. He shuffled to the comfortable armchair, with Dorothy clinging to his hand; now she was upon his lap.

"Well, Jimmy?"

"Well, honey?" James smiled with a ghastly effort at bluff, hearty ease. "We're up against it, I guess."

"Yes. What are we going to do?"

"About the car? Well—"

"I mean, what in the world are you going to tell Fred, Jimmy?"

James's eyes opened.

"The truth, I suppose. What else is there to tell him?"

"And then?"

"Well, then, my darling," James sighed heavily, "I'll have to get out in the great world, and find about two thousand dollars

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

somebody doesn't need for awhile, and buy Fred another car quick."

"Can you find that much, Jim?"

"Well, it isn't so much a question of whether I can, or can't," James opined, and swallowed at the peculiar dryness in his throat. "I've got to get it! You see, it isn't as if my darned credit wasn't stretched to the outside limit right now. It is. When I went to the bank for the last thousand, I thought they were going to send out for the police."

"There's the house here."

"It's kind of hard to get a third mortgage on a house like this," James said grimly. "Anyway, even if it was possible, it 'd take weeks, and I can't ask Fred to wait weeks for another car."

"No," said Dorothy.

Minutes on end, there was deep, gloomy silence in the erstwhile cheery living room. James pondered wildly, fruitlessly. He knew what was coming next. With her unlimited faith in him Dorothy would look up presently, perfectly confident that he had found the answer.

In fact, she was looking up at him even now. James steeled himself to return the trustful gaze with one of reasonable serenity; he was mildly astonished to find that he was facing a young woman quite filled with new determination.

"I'm going to tell him, Jimmy," said his wife.

"You?"

"Yes, because it was my fault, every bit of it. You didn't want to take the thing."

"True, but—"

"And if I hadn't been jealous, Jimmy, and treated you as I did, you'd never have gone crazy, and driven through that fence."

James grinned faintly.

"I didn't go crazy. There was a woodchuck in the road, and I didn't want to hit him, honey."

"A what?" said Dorothy, and gazed up at him. "Oh, you're so darned decent, Jimmy. You'd lie your poor old head off just to keep me comfortable. I know there wasn't any woodchuck. I was watching that road like a cat."

"Nevertheless, there was—"

"And another thing, Jimmy, Fred—Fred will take it better from me. The bad news, I mean."

"Why?"

"Oh, because—because I'm a girl, and—and all that sort of thing, you know," Mrs. Cranning responded vaguely, and did not gaze up at her husband.

Perhaps James imagined it; perhaps the tops of her ears were a little redder. At any rate, Mr. Cranning himself flushed slightly.

"I don't see it," said he with some vigor. "Just because you were in love with that fat-headed—"

"Oh, I wasn't really in love with him," Dorothy murmured.

"You thought you were."

"I must have thought so—yes."

"All right, then. That's one great big, fine, beautiful reason, kid, why you're not going to Fred Budlong, and—"

"Why, Jimmy!" gasped his wife, and sat up suddenly.

"What?"

"We can't either of us tell him the truth, of course."

James stared frankly.

"What do we do, then? Just ignore the fact that he ever had a car, and not mention it at all until I've raised the price of another? Fred Budlong may be good natured and considerate, and all that, but—"

"That's just what I'm trying to say," Mrs. Cranning replied quite feverishly. "If you went to Fred with the simple truth, you know exactly how he'd take it, don't you?"

"I haven't figured out the details."

"Well, Jimmy, I know Fred. I've known him ever since he was a big boy, and I was a little bit of a girl, and he has always been the same. There's a sort of flamboyant, magnificent streak in Fred, and he loves to indulge it on every possible occasion.

"And he really is the best-hearted and most generous creature alive, and just as soon as he understood what had happened—you see, he's made barrels and barrels of money these last years, and he knows you haven't—why, Jimmy, Fred would just slap you on the back, and tell you to forget all about it."

"Hey?"

"He would. And then he'd go, and buy

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

himself another car, and when you were able to pay for it, he'd simply laugh at you, and refuse to take a penny of the money. And I couldn't bear that, Jimmy," his wife said. "If that ever happened, and it would happen, I'd die of shame!"

James Cranning stared blankly.

"As a matter of fact, you're probably right," he muttered. "Fred is like that, isn't he? I remember how dog-gone grand he was about—"

"Oh, he's exactly like that, and he always has been, Jimmy. It's the one thing he'd be sure to do, and he'd be simply tickled to death at his own magnificence in doing it. Not that he'd go around boasting of it, of course; Fred isn't like that. But I'd die of humiliation, Jimmy! Truly! I wouldn't live one more day in this town, where I had to face him and Irma!"

Some little time the blankness on James's countenance grew; then it turned to a black scowl.

"Damnation take it!" he cried. "If I could only write out my check for two thousand and hand it to him!"

"He wouldn't accept it!"

"Maybe he wouldn't," James answered wildly. "But we'll have to do something, Dot. We—"

Dorothy smiled up rather uncertainly.

"You might get him another car, Jimmy—exactly like the one we ruined, you know. You might tell Fred to-night just—just that we had broken down somewhere and had to leave his car at a garage for repairs!"

"Hey? Yes!" cried James, and hope flickered suddenly into his distressed eye. "Some garage miles away from here!"

"Of course. And it might be well to forget the name of the town, too, so that he couldn't check up." Dorothy smiled, and flushed a trifle, possibly at her own powers. "And then, as soon as you can get a duplicate car, just give it to him and tell him the repairs are all right; and really, Jimmy, Fred's so big and careless and unobservant, I don't believe he'd ever know it wasn't his own automobile! That would be lovely, wouldn't it?"

"Oh, that 'd be great!" sighed James.

"Well, have you anything better to suggest, knowing Fred as we do?"

"To be absolutely on the level with you, my child, I have not," replied Mr. Cranning. "I'm not just wild about doing this, but I guess it's what 'll have to be done, all right enough. I'm not clear on what happens if I can't raise the two thousand for another car, but that will have to take care of itself."

"So call Fred up and tell him now."

"Call him up?" James cried. "You can't explain a thing like this to a man over the telephone."

"But—"

"Oh, no. Bad principle, anyway, Dot," James laughed sadly. "A job like this I have to do face to face. If I'm going to lie to Fred, I have to look him straight in the eye and lie like a gentleman. I'll go over now."

"It's nearly eleven, Jimmy."

"I can't help that, Dot. When the man is decent enough not to call you up and ask what in Hades has become of his car, I can't very well just go to sleep and forget it till morning."

"J-Jimmy!"

"Yes?"

"I think I'll go with you?"

"I think you'll stay here," James corrected firmly. "I don't know how gracefully I can carry off this crime if I'm alone, but I know darned well I'd go to pieces if I felt you there watching me! By-by, honey!"

He arose with much determination and reached for his hat. Dorothy, eyes lowered, clung to his hand.

"Jimmy!" she said again.

"What is it, kid?"

"Jimmy, I—I'm not jealous. I'm cured of all that, really and truly. But you won't stay over there long, talking to—"

"Irma?"

"Well—yes," Dorothy murmured.

Young Mr. Cranning's lips tightened.

"Listen to me, kid!" he said rather ominously. "I'm going over there to talk to Irma's husband. Irma's probably in bed and asleep by this time. But whether she is or isn't, if I hear much more of this Irma twaddle I swear I think I will—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Jimmy, please! Jimmy, I didn't mean it! Honestly, I didn't!" Dorothy cried, and threw her arms about his neck.

It may be said that James remained stern and infuriated for at least ten seconds. After that, however, gazing downward, he viewed in Dorothy's eyes a soul quite naked in its utter repentance; and he found that he was kissing, with the utmost enthusiasm, a very adorable and responsive young wife.

For some little time it seemed that Mr. Fred Budlong might not be advised of his misfortune until two or three o'clock next morning; but the kiss came to an end at last and, with a final hug, James departed, walking briskly and with head well up.

For awhile he had cherished the strongest aversion to the job ahead. Now, so wonderful is the effect of true love and abundant faith, he felt able to laugh in the job's very face. It was all in a lifetime, of course, and a luckless mischance that might have happened to anybody.

Strong in the knowledge that he was doing the one possible thing, he'd be able to face Mr. Budlong, and just lie and lie and lie so convincingly that within five minutes good old Fred would be patting his shoulder and bidding him not to worry about the tooth he had wrenched from the steering-gear—James had decided that it was a tooth in the steering-gear that he had broken—and just to get the old boiler back as soon as he could. After that Fred would offer him a drink, which James would decline, and the incident would be closed.

Except, of course, for finding the price of another car within a day or two. Coming to this phase, James did not walk quite so briskly. Still—nothing is impossible.

He'd go first to—um—just where would he go first? Not to Sam Kipp, because he already owed Sam two thousand dollars. Not to Ward Stevenson, his cousin several times removed, for at present he was indebted to Ward to the tune of some eighteen hundred dollars; and in any case, Ward was not the most amiable lender in the world. Nor could he very well approach— Oh, he had arrived at the Fred Budlong home, had he not?

Just for a moment James turned cold.

Probably they were all abed at this hour, eh? Probably arousing Fred, and forcing him to pull on some clothes and come down, and all that, would be no more or less than a low-down, inexcusable trick? Surely, if Fred really was so little concerned about his car as not even to wait up for its return, it were a wicked shame to break his slumbers!

James gazed quite hopefully at the house, a vague, black mass against the gloom of poorly illuminated Sunnyvale. There wouldn't be a light in the place, of course, and so he'd just turn around and trot home, and explain to-morrow morning, and— Oh, there was a light, after all. In fact, there were two lights, one of them upstairs in a front bedroom, and the other, which was one of those fool, murky glimmers wherewith Irma obtained some of her peculiar decorative effects, down here in the lower hall.

Young Mr. Cranning sighed. They were not asleep. For that matter, they hadn't even left the lower part of the house for the night, because Fred always turned off this light before his final ascent. James Cranning rested one sad hand upon the doorknob and reached toward the button.

To his mild astonishment, the knob turned in his fingers and the door opened. He grinned and sighed again. As elsewhere in life, the road here to trouble had no obstructions! He entered, and forced the grin to become more ingratiating as he turned it in the direction of the little side room, where Fred undoubtedly was reading.

Although it seemed that he was doing nothing of the kind. That room was quite black, as was the one directly across the hall, and the dining room too; and even, James discerned through the open door of this last, as was the Budlong kitchen. Upstairs there was a dim light in the hall, and—

From up there suddenly came one thin scream!

It was a woman's voice, too, and—well, there was another scream! This one sounded as if it had been choked off abruptly.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Putting Crime Over

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "Madame Storey's Way," "The Legacy Hounds," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

IT was owing to the last-minute illness of Mrs. Cornelius Marquardt that I had the good fortune to be included in this little dinner of Mme. Storey's. Her guests do not often disappoint.

Everybody in the know is aware that the best talk in New York is to be heard around her table. She picks her guests with that end in view, careless of their social position. One may meet a visiting marquis or a tramp poet—the poet more often than the marquis.

Mme. Storey herself is a better talker, in my opinion, than any of them, but one would be slow to learn that at her own table. Her object there is merely to keep the ball rolling briskly. She likes to listen better than to talk.

On this occasion the men included Ambrose G. Larned, the brilliant advertising man, who had introduced so many new ideas into his profession; John Durward, the famous English novelist; Harry Evans Colter, our own clever and popular short story writer; and Inspector Rumsey, of the New York police.

Rumsey, the dear little man, is not at all a brilliant person; but he is a perfect compendium of crime, and, since crime seems to be the most interesting of all subjects to persons of every degree nowadays, Mme. Storey finds him very useful at the dinner table. When people try to draw *her* out on the subject of crime, she shifts them on to Rumsey.

Foreigners regard us Americans as preeminent in crime; they come over here to see crime; and when we have a distinguished visitor like Mr. Durward, Rumsey is pretty sure to be included.

My mistress, as you know, is not enamored of crime, and she managed to divert

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the talk to other subjects until after we had left the table. When the little company was grouped around the amusing 1850 living room upstairs, it could no longer be staved off, and she let it have its way.

I must tell you that New York was experiencing a crime wave at the moment—but indeed it always is. It is like an ocean beach, with one crime wave falling right on top of the one before.

This was the time of the bobbed-hair-bandit sensation, when many of the smaller jewelers were putting in defensive arrangements of siren whistles and tear gas. These things were always going off accidentally and throwing whole neighborhoods into a panic. The Englishman was all agog as he listened.

Everybody is familiar with Mr. Durward's fine head with its silvery hair and delicately chiseled features. He supplied a chorus of "Amazing! Extraordinary! Incredible!" to all the stories that were told.

"In the middle of the day!" I remember him saying. "With crowds passing in the street, these fellows go boldly into your jewelry shops, and point their guns, and take what they please, and get away scot-free! Such a thing would be impossible in London!"

"Not impossible," Inspector Rumsey pointed out good-humoredly. "It has happened even in London. Your police are luckier than we are, that's all. For London streets are narrow and crooked, and the few main thoroughfares are always crowded. It is exceedingly difficult to make a get-away. Now, our streets are broad and straight, and only one of them is completely full of traffic during business hours. You may have noticed that our holdups never take place in the center, but always in busy neighborhoods off the center, where there is enough traffic to conceal the bandits in their get-away, but not enough to stop them."

"Well, what's to be done? Are you just going to submit to this state of affairs?"

"There is a remedy," said Inspector Rumsey quietly, "whenever the public is willing to pay for it."

"And what is that?"

"It is ridiculous and humiliating to the police to be forced to go on foot, when every bandit is provided with an automobile. All patrolmen should be mounted on motorcycles."

"Hear! Hear!" said Mme. Storey.

"Even the women are taking to banditry!" murmured Mr. Durward. "An incredible country!"

"There's a good deal of nonsense about her," said the inspector. "The newspapers have played up the bobbed-hair bandit so hard that their credulous readers see a bobbed-hair bandit everywhere they look."

"And I notice that the police are advertising in the subway cars," Mr. Durward went on. "Cards addressed to the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bandits, warning them that they will certainly be caught in the end. Surely that is very naïve."

"Well," said the inspector, smiling and firm in the defense of his beloved department, "we must try everything."

Colter spoke up, a young man quick in his movements, with an eager, warm-colored face: "If you're sure to get him in the end, why bother to advertise?"

"It was Mr. Larned, here, who persuaded the commissioner to use those cards," said Rumsey.

"Anything can be accomplished by intelligent publicity," said Larned.

He went on to sing the praises of the wonderful new science, of which he was one of the most brilliant professors. A handsome man in his forties, with the full, beaming eye of the enthusiast, we were all sensible of his charm. He was of that type not uncommon in our country, the artist turned business man.

They said his private life was rather scandalous, but I know nothing about that. His new wife was among the ladies present, a pretty woman, but negligible as far as conversation went.

"That's all true," said Harry Colter, when he could get an opening, "but publicity is a two-edged sword which is apt to cut in unexpected directions."

"Take these subway cards," went on Larned. "The idea was that the bandit lives in a world of his own, supported and encouraged by those of his kind, and cut off from all others. It was thought that it would be a good thing to remind him in this unexpected fashion of the existence of the real world which would not tolerate his actions. I appeal to Mme. Storey to tell us if this is not sound psychology."

My mistress smiled in a way that told me what her opinion was, but refused to commit herself.

"Harry has something more to say on the subject," she remarked.

"It's a confession of weakness on the part of the police," said Colter energetically. "Mr. Durward, with his fresh point of view, instantly perceived that. Irrespective of the effect on an occasional bandit, it certainly lowers the morale of the whole public that rides in the subway. For the public relies on the stern and secret measures of the police in dealing with crooks, and to have them come out in the open like this and beg the bandits to be good cannot help but be demoralizing."

Inspector Rumsey agreed with Colter, though nothing could induce him to admit that the department could be in the wrong.

"It is true," he said, "the stick-up boys have the public scared. And every story of a successful holdup that the newspapers print is just that much additional publicity for the bandits."

"You can't blame the newspapers for that," said Larned.

"I don't. It's their job to purvey the news. But it's too bad they've got to feature it the way they do."

"That just proves my point," said Larned. "You've got to have a counter-publicity to deal with it."

I felt impelled to put in my oar at this point. Though I'm only a humble secretary, Mme. Storey expects me to keep my end up. There must be no dummies at her table.

"But a true counter-publicity would be directed toward boosting the public morale instead of further depressing it," I suggested.

Mr. Larned gave me a cold look, as much as to say: Who is this red-haired female? His eyes quickly passed on to my mistress.

"Perhaps Mme. Storey will tell us how she would handle the situation," he said.

My mistress held up her hands in mock dismay.

"Thank Heaven, I'm not obliged to answer that," she said laughing. "My job is quite difficult enough. Bandits are a little out of my line."

II.

Some days or weeks after the dinner party, when all recollection of this conversation had passed out of my mind, I was working in the outer office of our suite on Gramercy Park one morning, when a good-looking young man came in. He was a mere lad of nineteen or so, but his face

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wore that unnatural look of experience and assurance that suggests a childhood spent on the streets.

Yet my eyes dwelt on him with pleasure. Though short of stature, he was beautifully made; he moved with a lithe grace that suggested the perfect coördination of every muscle.

His round head was set low between his strong shoulders; the black hair was crisp with health, the black eyes sparkling. I suspected Italian blood. He was well dressed in a somewhat common style, and he addressed me with an ingratiating smile.

"Is this Mme. Storey's office?" Like the wolf in the old story, he was trying to sweeten his harsh voice.

"Yes," said I.

"Are you her?"

"No; her secretary." I could see that the little wretch was only trying to flatter me.

"Well, is she in?"

"Mme. Storey can only receive visitors by appointment," I said. "Will you tell me your business?"

"Sure," he said, with an appearance of the utmost good humor, plumping himself into a chair without waiting for an invitation. His bright eyes traveled around the room, taking everything in. "You sure got a swell joint here," he remarked sociably.

I ignored this. "What can I do for you?" I asked coldly.

I could see from the beginning that he was just stringing me along; but it never occurred to me to suspect he might have a sinister motive. All kinds of people come into the office, and waste my time, particularly when we have been engaged on a big case, with all its attendant publicity.

"I just wanted to apply for a job," he answered.

"A job?" I said, surprised. "What sort of job?"

"Anything at all," he said, grinning. "I read in the papers how Mme. Storey employed a whole raft of, now, operatives, private detectives like, in the Harker case."

"It is only occasionally that she is engaged on a criminal case," said I. "And then any operatives that we may require are secured temporarily from a list that we keep."

"Well, put me down on your list," he said. "John Casey, 123 East Broadway."

He was no Casey! However, as the quickest way of getting rid of him, I wrote the address on a pad.

"You got a swell job here, secretary to Mme. Storey and all," he said while I was writing. "Somepin' doin' alla time, I guess."

I made no answer.

"Don't she employ no clerk nor office boy nor nothin'?" he asked.

"No," I told him.

"There'd be the job for me," he said.

"Well, let me have a sample of your handwriting," I suggested, pushing the pad toward him. I thought I had him there.

He drew back. "I got a cramp in me hand to-day," he said without batting an eye. "Along of catching a swift one yestiddy. But say, I could make myself useful here, receivin' callers and runnin' errands and all. And when you needed an outside man I'd be on the spot."

I shook my head.

"And say, when she was out I'd be company for you," he said with a sidelong grin.

The good-looking little wretch was actually trying to vamp me. I was highly amused. His sharp eyes perceived my amusement, and it encouraged him to go further.

"Say, what's your name?" he asked.

"I don't see that that matters," I said.

"Just in case I wanted to write you later to see if there was an openin'."

"I will write to you if there is an opening," I said dryly.

He affected to laugh heartily. "Gee, you're wise, all right! You're there with the comeback!"

He came close to me and smiled insinuatingly. I suppose with a certain type of girl he had found himself irresistible. "Me and you'd get along fine, eh?"

"I dare say," I said coldly. "But you will have to excuse me. I'm busy."

"Is that the door to her room?" he asked, pointing.

I did not answer. He knew that it was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the door to her room, because there was no other except that by which he had entered.

"Let me take a look in," he said cajolingly. "I bet it's a swell room!"

"Certainly not!" I said, rising to forestall any move to open the door. "Mme. Storey must not be disturbed."

"Oh, I didn't know she was in there," he remarked with an innocent air. "Well, so long, kid," with a final grin over his shoulder. "You know where to find me." And went out.

It did not occur to me to be angry. Indeed, after he had gone, I sat down at my desk, smiling. Such is the power of youth and good looks. I merely put him down in my mind as another fresh kid.

Immediately afterward Mme. Storey called me in to take dictation. We were still suffering from the publicity attendant upon the famous Harker case, and there was a pile of letters six inches high on her desk.

My mistress as a matter of courtesy insists on writing once to everybody who writes to her. Of course if they continue to send in trifling letters they go into the wastebasket. Had we been less busy, I would no doubt have related the incident of my caller just for her amusement, and the whole course of subsequent events might have been changed; but as it was, I did not mention him.

I have on several former occasions described the arrangements of my mistress's beautiful room. There is nothing about it to connote the word office.

Once the front drawing-room of a great house on Gramercy Park, it is now furnished with priceless Italian antiques, and forms a fit setting for Mme. Storey, who is herself like a vivid figure out of the Renaissance—but not antique. In spite of all pressure from the outside, she preserves her individuality.

She refuses to organize her genius, nor will she work herself to death either. She accepts the few cases that most appeal to her; all the others are turned down. I constitute her entire office force; and when we feel like it we close up the office altogether, and go for a jaunt.

Mme. Storey sits at an immense oak table, black with age, her back to the row of casement windows which look out on the square. At her right hand is the door into my room, and in the same wall near the back of the long room, another door leading directly into the hall.

This door, which is closed with a spring lock, permits her to escape from anybody waiting in my room, whom she may not want to bother with. In the middle of the back wall is a door giving on what we call the middle room, which is used for the multitudinous requirements of our peculiar business—dressing-room, hiding place, temporary jail, and what not. The three rooms constitute our suite.

In taking dictation I sit at my mistress's right hand, with my back to the door from my room. We were in the middle of our work without a thought in our minds except the desire to get to the bottom of that pile of silly letters, when the buzzer sounded that announced the opening of the outer door into my room.

I finished the sentence I was putting down, and rose to my feet. I got no farther, for at that moment the door from my room burst open, and two men ran in, each grasping an ugly automatic.

One was my visitor of half an hour before; the other was a few years older.

What a moment that was! Death itself could not have been worse than what I suffered. My heart turned to water in my breast; I seemed to lose all strength, all control of my body.

How I longed to shrivel up to nothing before those guns! I dared not look at my mistress, who was alongside, and a little behind me. My eyes were glued to those hideous weapons.

"Stick 'em up!" barked the older man.

My hands went over my head like a shot. They strained away from me, as if desirous of flying up under the ceiling on their own account. I heard Mme. Storey drawl:

"I'll put mine on the table if you don't mind. The other attitude is so ungraceful."

I stole a look at her. Good Heavens! What a woman! She was actually smiling. The sight of her smile did not put any heart into me, though.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It gave me a dreadful pang to realize that those worthless youths, the sweepings of the streets, held the life of such a glorious woman in their hands.

"None of your tricks!" growled the leader.

"Bless your heart, I wouldn't think of it!" drawled Mme. Storey. "I have a gun in the drawer of this table, but I'm not going to try to get it out. I value my skin too highly."

"Look through those two doors," the leader said to his companion. "I'll keep the women covered."

As silently as a shadow, the younger man ran to the two doors. "This door goes out into the hall," he said at the first; and at the other: "Nobody in this room."

"Do you mind if I smoke?" said Mme. Storey, moving her hand toward the big silver box that stood on her table.

"Keep your hands in front of you!" barked the leader.

Taking a step forward, he threw back the cover of the box. Seeing that it contained only cigarettes, he shrugged, and allowed my mistress to take one.

"Won't you join me?" she drawled mockingly.

He helped himself, tossing the cigarette up to his mouth without taking his eyes from Mme. Storey's face. She nonchalantly lighted up, and offered him the burning match. He put the cigarette to it, with his eyes fixed on hers.

What a picture! While the first one was merely a good looking boy, this one was infernally handsome. Mme. Storey's face still wore the mocking half smile; his was like a mask.

It was perfectly inhuman in its immobility; not a muscle quivered; his very eyes appeared to be glazed. It made a cold shiver run down my spine.

"Hand over your pearls," he said.

Putting down the cigarette for a moment, Mme. Storey unfastened the string about her neck.

"I'm sorry they're not my best ones," she said. "Still, they're pretty good." She tossed them over.

"Your watch, your rings," he went on, dropping the pearls in his pockets.

She unfastened her watch with calm deliberation, holding her head on one side to keep the cigarette smoke out of her eyes, and drew off her lovely emerald, and the three diamonds. They followed the pearls into his pocket.

Meanwhile the other man commanded me to hand over my pearls.

"A-ah!" snarled his leader out of the side of his mouth. "They're only fish-skin. Don't yeh know the difference?"

The young man refused my beads then, with an abashed look like a schoolboy. But I had to hand over the watch that Mme. Storey gave me, and the little diamond I bought with my own savings.

My heart burned with helpless anger. My little stone had not a fraction of the value of Mme. Storey's, but she could replace her's the next day, whereas mine represented years of self-denial. What kind of a world was it, I thought, where such wrongs were permitted.

"Your money!" said the leader harshly to my mistress.

"It's in the same drawer with my gun," she told him pleasantly.

He put a hand on the table, and leaned over, bringing his mask-like face close to hers.

"Get it out," he said curtly, "and let me see you touch the gun, that's all."

"By no means!" said Mme. Storey, smiling. "I just wanted to warn you, so you wouldn't shoot at the sight of it."

Pulling the drawer toward her, she picked up her gold mesh bag, and tossed it on the table in front of him.

"Now the gun," he added. "Pick it up by the muzzle."

She obeyed. "I'd be glad if you'd let me have my handky out of the bag," she said. "I may need it."

"Ah, cut the comedy," he told her with his indifferent air. "Where's your safe?"

"In the outer office. There's nothing in it but business papers. My secretary will open it for you."

"You go with her," said the leader to his man.

I leave you to imagine what my feelings were when I had to turn my back on the gun, and walk out of the room with it fol-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lowing me. I nearly died out of sheer terror. I felt a hundred bullets tearing through my body.

But I got the safe open somehow, and satisfied the young bandit that it contained nothing of value to him.

We returned to the other room. My mistress was smiling still. The young bandit was sitting now, with his chair tipped back in a parade of indifference.

No muscle of his waxen face had changed, but there was a glint in his eyes as he watched Mme. Storey. He contemptuously permitted her to see that he approved of her as a woman.

When his man reported that there was nothing in the safe, he stood up.

"Then back out," he said, with a jerk of his head toward the door into the hall.

"Why hurry?" drawled my mistress. "Let's have in tea."

The leader stopped. An open, scornful admiration leaped up in his eyes. The insolence of it was simply indescribable.

"You're a pretty game chicken, ain't yeh?" he drawled, putting a hand on his hip in a swaggering fashion. "You look good to me."

He dropped his gun in his pocket—he knew he had her disarmed—and returned a step or two toward the table. He drew a ring off his finger and tossed it toward her.

"Wear that," he said. In a flash he was gone.

When the door closed after them I collapsed. I could hear myself bawling like a child, without any power to stop it. The next thing I knew I was pulling frantically at one of the casements, so that I might alarm the street.

Mme. Storey drew me away before I got it open.

"No good," she said. "They'll have a car waiting. You'll only start a panic among the kiddies in the park."

I could still hear myself crying and carrying on like somebody else. "Why didn't you send for the engineer? The button is there under the edge of your table for just such an emergency."

"What!" she said, smiling at me. "And bring John in here empty-handed to get shot?"

"It's outrageous!" I cried. "Coming in here like that! And you take it so calmly. The way that man looked at you was intolerable."

Mme. Storey smilingly quoted the childish couplet, slightly amended:

> "Sticks and stones will break my bones,
> But looks will never hurt me."

"Such insolence!" I cried. "I cannot bear it!"

"Oh, a shot of heroin will do wonders to buck up a man's self-esteem," she said calmly.

She was sitting there smiling, and examining the fellow's ring with the eye of a connoisseur. It was a handsome carnelian in a wonderful antique setting. Heaven knows from whom it had been stolen.

The sight of her indifference drove me almost into a frenzy. "Aren't you going to do anything?" I cried.

"Oh, surely," she said, partly arousing herself. "Do all the usual things, my Bella; telephone to the police and to the newspapers. But as for me"—she relapsed into her smiling, musing upon the ring—"I intend to have a little fun out of this."

III.

WITH proper management this affair need never have got into the newspapers, since no whisper of an alarm had been raised. But Mme. Storey disdained to conceal it; on the contrary, she informed the press herself.

"It would make such a good story, it would be a shame to keep it from them," she said in her provoking way.

Of course, as I was to learn later, this publicity was necessary to the plan that was even then shaping itself in her mind; but I couldn't guess that in the beginning.

Well, you can imagine what a sensation was created by the news. The famous Mme. Storey held up in her own office by a pair of youthful bandits! To come as it did, right on the heels of her brilliant success in the Harker case, when her name and fame was on everybody's lips, gave point to the tale. While the newspapers were still terming her the greatest crimi-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nologist of modern times, here she was stuck up by a couple of boys and robbed of her pearls!

It is a weakness of all democracies, they say, that when a citizen is elevated above the heads of the mob, nothing pleases the said mob better than to find an excuse to turn and shy things at the hero. We had to submit to an unmerciful razzing, both public and private. What a chance it gave to the cartoonists!

Mme. Storey, I need hardly say, took it all smilingly. Borne up by her secret knowledge of the retribution she was preparing, I think she actually enjoyed it. She encouraged the razzers that her revenge might be more complete in the end.

But it was a bad time for me. I ground my teeth every time the telephone rang. My temper was in a continual state of exacerbation. Not the least of what I had to submit to were the hypocritical condolences of all the old cats in the boarding house where I live.

Inspector Rumsey suffered no less than I did. That his police had allowed Mme. Storey to be robbed right under their noses, so to speak, caused the worthy little man almost to burst with chagrin. He wanted to surround us afterward with a whole cordon of police wherever we went, but of course Mme. Storey would not hear of anything like that.

What she had termed all the usual things were done, of course, and nothing came of it. We furnished the police with exact descriptions of the bandits, which were sent broadcast. Several of the best men attached to the Central Office were put on the case.

Mme. Storey and I went down to headquarters and turned over hundreds of pages of the Rogues' Gallery, without finding the faces we were in search of. Inspector Rumsey was not surprised by it.

"Every year," he said bitterly, "we have a fresh crop of young desperadoes to deal with."

I could not but be sorry for our friend during these days. His difficulties were owing to no fault of his own. After our robbery the crime wave mounted to still greater heights. Nearly every day the police had a fresh holdup to deal with, and on some days three or four.

"The publicity attached to your case has bucked them up all down the line," Inspector Rumsey said bitterly.

Mme. Storey herself took no direct measures toward searching for the bandits. One day when I was burning with indignation at the facetious comments of some newspaper or another, I ventured to remonstrate with her on this.

"Oh, our little holdup boys were merely pawns in the game, my Bella," she told me. "I'm after the commanding pieces."

I was relieved to learn that she was not entirely idle in the matter.

One morning, when she took off her hat I cried out in dismay upon perceiving that she had acquired a boy's haircut overnight. I must confess that it was very becoming, revealing as it did the beautiful shape of her head and emphasizing the pure line of her profile. Still I hated to see her adopt so extreme a fashion.

She smiled at my distress. "Wait!" she said, holding up her hand, and disappeared within the middle room.

An hour later she called me to her. I stopped in the doorway, aghast. She stood in the middle of the room, striking an attitude.

I say "she," but at the first glance it seemed to me as if my mistress had vanished, leaving a horrible changeling in her stead. The closely cut hair was now silvered, and her face heavily made up, one might almost say enameled.

Around the eyes and mouth it was cunningly shadowed to suggest the hollows of growing age; in a phrase, the fashionable, hard-living woman of fifty.

She was wearing a costume cut in severe mannish lines, showing a rolling silk collar at the neck, and a Bohemian tie. A little tough hat went with it, and a malacca stick with a plain ivory knob. I'm sure you get the picture: an elderly charmer of the highest fashion, handsome, hard, and utterly reckless.

"Will it pass?" she asked in a throaty voice with a hint of huskiness.

"It is marvelous," I murmured.

"I am Kate Arkledon," she went on,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with a half sneer which was fixed in her face; to smile would have ruined the effect. "Have you ever heard of her?"

I shook my head.

"A little before your time, I suppose. Ten years ago Kate Arkledon was one of the cleverest confidence women in the United States. She was famous in her way. Then suddenly she dropped out of sight of all her former associates. As a matter of fact, she is living in respectability and affluence not a dozen doors from me. Once upon a time I did her a service which she has never forgotten.

"Well, with her permission, I am staging a come-back for Kate Arkledon. There is a slight resemblance between us, which I have built upon. It will be good enough at least to deceive anybody who has not seen her for ten years."

I foresaw danger ahead, and my heart sank.

Mme. Storey broke off, to study me through narrowed eyes. "Turn around," she said.

"What do you want of me?" I faltered.

"Get a permanent wave," she said.

"But I will look like a Hottentot!" I cried.

"Of course," she said calmly. "They all do when they come out from under the curlers. You will make a very effective red-haired vamp, my Bella. I will dress you and teach you how to make up for it."

"But the make-up is only the beginning!" I gasped. "I could not possibly keep up such a part."

"Certainly you could. It will not be nearly so difficult as the character of Canada Annie, which you carried off so well. You can be a Dumb Dora this time with nothing to do but sit and look unutterable things at men. All you will have to say is 'Ain't it the truth!' when you agree, or very scornfully, 'So's yer old man!' when you disagree."

All this was uttered in the sneering, husky tones of the character she was portraying. It made me shiver.

"What are we going to do?" I asked fearfully.

"We are going to organize a little holdup gang of our own," said Kate Arkledon with a wicked grin.

A cry was forced from me. I could not imagine anybody less fitted for the part of bandit than myself.

"Not really—not really!" I faltered.

"It will be just as real as I can make it appear," she said. "I mean to pull off a stunt or two in the most spectacular style."

I groaned inwardly.

"This is how I figure it out, Bella," she said in her natural voice. "There is certainly an organization behind the crime wave; but it's operating along new lines. It's a very loose and flexible organization, with all the units working independently of each other. Well, my idea is to form a unit of my own which will function so brilliantly that the organization will be forced to make overtures to us. Inspector Rumsey is in the secret."

I tasted in advance the awful excitement that was in store, and my heart was like lead in my breast. But I would have torn my tongue out sooner than protest aloud.

IV.

Busy days followed. It was impossible to let our other business slide, and we had to lead double lives.

By day Mme. Storey and her secretary, Bella Brickley, worked in the offices on Gramercy Park, taking care to give out an interview to the newspapers occasionally, so that our presence there was regularly established. By night Kate Arkledon and her pal, Peggy Ray, showed themselves in certain gilded resorts on the West Side.

A good many days passed before I got accustomed to the sight of my painted and bedizened self in the mirror. On the whole, though, I had an easy rôle to play. All that was required of me was to act as a foil for my mistress.

For the purpose of enabling us to change from one character to another and back again, we engaged a room in one of the nondescript warrens on West Forty-Seventh Street, where all kinds of queer little businesses are carried on by all kinds of queer characters. One could enter or leave such

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a building at any hour without exciting remark.

For Kate Arkledon's regular hang-out we chose a well-known West Side street, once fashionable, and now much favored of the white collar gentry. It often breaks into the news. However, I shall not name it for fear of depressing real estate values.

We rented a four room flat in a pretentious apartment house, where the tenants' reference were not too closely scanned; and here we immediately began to gather our gang round us.

Mme. Storey's principal aid in this affair was the man I shall call Benny Abell, though that was not his real name, nor yet the name by which he had become famous in the underworld. If you have read my account of the Melanie Soupert case you will remember him.

His specialty had been sticking up the box offices of theaters, always working alone, and displaying a truly superhuman nerve. Since my mistress had broken up the Varick Street gang he had become reunited with his family, and had gone straight.

Mme. Storey needed him now as a sort of liaison officer with crookdom, where his exploits were still remembered. She never had any intention of using him in an actual hold-up, which would have been like a nightmare to the poor fellow who had been through so much.

Abell, when I first knew him, was a small, determined, white-faced man, of an elegant appearance. Trained to a finish by danger, he was like a sheaf of quivering nerves.

Now happiness had caused him to take on flesh, and his face to assume a serene expression. However, he worked hard to reduce for this emergency, and played his part admirably.

Next we took in George Stephens, one of our regular operatives, and the best man we had after Crider. I should have been glad to have had Crider himself at our back, but he has worked for us so long Mme. Storey feared the danger of his being recognized. She didn't want to have any more disguises than she could help. Stephens had the advantage of not having been in America long. A young fellow of aristocratic appearance, he soon acquired the soubriquet of English George.

Our remaining man was Bert Farren, a mere boy who has done good work for us on one or two occasions. Mme. Storey chose him because boy bandits seemed to be the fashion.

We still lacked a direct, present connection with the world of crooks; but my mistress said we would have to wait for circumstances to furnish that.

Very early in the game the scene of our first exploit was chosen. This was the jewelry store of B. & J. Fossberg, a large and handsome establishment on Broadway not a hundred miles from One Hundredth Street. It is the finest establishment of the sort on the upper West Side.

Inspector Rumsey was acquainted with Benjamin Fossberg, one of the proprietors, and after a great deal of persuasion won his consent to the staged hold-up. His brother was told, of course, but the clerks were kept in the dark.

It was arranged that the guns which were kept in the store for protection should be removed as if for repairs on the day of the stick-up.

Night after night the five of us met in the flat on West —— Street to discuss and rehearse our plans. I had no idea that such elaborate preparations were required to stage an affair which would be all over in a minute or two.

By day our three men watched the store until they were familiar with every detail of the business routine. The Fossbergs had not fallen for any of the idiotic safeguards such as tear gas, sirens, etc. They trusted to the imposing appearance of their establishment to overawe gunmen.

It was on a corner, and occupied the space of three ordinary stores. No such big place had ever been attacked.

A detailed plan of the store was drawn out, together with a map of the neighborhood. This we all studied. Each of us was allotted his station, and many rehearsals took place.

To me fell the comparatively easy job of acting as look-out on the sidewalk. Mme. Storey was to enter, and ask to have goods shown her. George and Bert were to cover

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her get-away with their guns, while Abell was to drive the car, which was to be waiting in the side street.

When the business of the evening was over, it was our custom to show ourselves at one or another of the gilded resorts in the neighborhood. Gradually we settled on the Boule' Miche' as our public hangout.

Abell, who had been making inquiries, said that it had become a favorite gathering place of the white collar gangs. It occupied the site of a famous old New York restaurant on Columbus Avenue, which had rapidly gone down hill after prohibition, and changed its name half a dozen times.

You would never have guessed the characters of its frequenters from their appearance. Everybody looks alike nowadays. In the Boule' Miche' you found exactly the same sort of sleek, showy women, accompanied by sleek and not so showy men, that you would see in any other night club.

It was only when you possessed a key to their occupation that you began to perceive a certain wary look in the eyes of the men; a tendency to glance toward the door every time it was opened. Once in a while strange snatches of conversation would reach your ears. Of course, many perfectly respectable people must have been included among the patrons of the place.

The present proprietor was a dark-skinned gentleman, with a perpetual gleaming smile, and a hard eye that was anything but smiling. His evening clothes fitted him to a marvel. His name was Bat Bartley, and Abell knew him.

He was one of those mysterious New York characters whom everybody knows, and nobody knows anything about. It was the custom of all his patrons to fawn on him, as they always do in such places —I can't tell you why; and while he smiled he scarcely troubled to conceal his contempt of them.

When Abell introduced my mistress to him as Kate Arkledon I saw the wary eyes narrow slightly. Evidently he was familiar with that name. My mistress treated him with cool disdain, whereupon he immediately began to fawn on *her!* Such is human nature!

Upon our first visits to the Boule' Miche' nobody attempted to address us, though, of course, so striking a figure as that of my mistress could not pass unnoticed. People stared at her, and whispered to each other, clearly asking who she was.

No doubt they asked the proprietor, and no doubt he told them—or at least such of them as he could trust. By degrees a tinge of respect and admiration appeared in the glances of the regular habitués. One could almost pick out those who belonged to the fraternity of crooks by the way they looked at the supposed Kate Arkledon.

And then one night we had an encounter which terrified me; I thought our whole elaborate structure was about to collapse. I needn't have been terrified. I underrated my mistress's superb aplomb.

An old boy with a red face and bulging blue eyes, who had been talking to Bat Bartley, came to our table. His Tuxedo, while of good material, was of an old fashion; an air of having seen better days clung around him. Fixing his bloodshot eyes on my mistress, he asked:

"Is this Kate Arkledon?"

"The same," she said, with an air of cynical indifference she now affected.

"Well, well, well!" he said. "I never should have known you, Kate. And you, I see, have completely forgotten me."

My mistress made believe to study him. "Your face is very familiar to me," she said. "But the name—the name—"

He shook his head mournfully. "To think that *you* should have forgotten me! Remember the St. Louis Fair?"

Mme. Storey must have had Kate Arkledon's biography at her finger tips.

"Chad Herring!" she said instantly, and offered the old fellow her hand. "But how changed!"

"Ah, don't rub it in!" he said. "I know it! Chad Herring's on the shelf! But you, good Heaven, you're fresh as paint!"

"Paint is right!" said my mistress, with her scornful smile, touching her cheek meanwhile.

He laughed uproariously. "Just as smart as ever, I see! You're a wonder, Kate!"

"Sit down," she said.

I trembled at her temerity. Surely the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least slip would be fatal. She introduced us all to him by our underworld names.

"Young blood—young blood!" he muttered, sadly shaking his head. He turned to her with a pathetic eagerness. "Kate, what do you hear of Bill Blandick and Paddy Nolan—" He named a whole string of names. "The old gang."

"All gone," she said, spreading out her hands. "That is, gone from me. I have not heard of any of them for more than ten years."

"What have you been doing, Kate?"

"Leading a godly, righteous and sober life," she replied with a bitter sneer.

"You don't look it," he said innocently.

"Ah, there's nothing like dullness to break you up!" she told him. "I'm done with a respectable life. I've come back."

"Come back?" he repeated almost with horror. "At your age! Remember, I know how old you are."

"Well, you needn't broadcast it," she said sharply.

What a wonderful piece of acting she was giving!

"Come back!" he repeated again. "Do you think you can keep your end up in this day of youth and jazz and high-powered automobiles?"

"And why not?" she demanded proudly. "My nerve is as steady as ever. Look at that hand." She held it out. "And I can teach these youngsters a thing or two. Good God, Chad—think of the opportunities nowadays! There was never anything like it in the old days!"

He looked at her with that same fear. I suppose that the fierce energy she expressed made him feel old and broken by way of contrast.

After a little desultory talk he ambled away. Presently we saw him telling Bat Bartley about it.

"That will help establish our characters," said my mistress calmly.

V.

On the morning of the appointed day I awoke in blessed unconsciousness and lay staring at the ceiling. Then the realization of what was before me came winging back, and the bottom seemed to drop out of my stomach. I suppose it was much the same feeling as that experienced by a murderer on the morning of his execution. The worst of it was, our stunt was not to be pulled off until four o'clock, the most crowded time on upper Broadway, and I had all those miserable hours to put in beforehand. My breakfast choked me.

Every detail having been completed the night before, there was nothing for Mme. Storey and I to do but proceed to the office in our own characters and attend to our usual business.

During the day that amazing woman, my mistress, gave out interviews, talked over the telephone, and dictated letters as if it was no different from any other day in the year. If she noticed that my hand was prone to tremble and my voice to shake, she never spoke of it. Indeed, no reference of any kind was made to what was almost immediately before us.

At three o'clock she locked the drawer of her desk and said to me casually: "Well, Bella, let's go."

I declare, from the openness of her smile and the brightness of her eye, one might have thought it was a picnic we were bound on. She enjoyed it!

Proceeding by taxi to the room on Forty-Seventh Street, we transformed ourselves into Kate Arkledon and Peggy Ray. I noticed that my mistress, while carefully preserving the same character, toned down her make-up somewhat. For the jewelers' she did not wish to emphasize the hardness, the recklessness that she flaunted in the Boule' Miche' every night.

As it was, the perfection of her plain, smart get-up and her high manner created a figure that any jeweler would rejoice to see coming into his shop. Around her neck she clasped a short string of valuable pearls, her only ornaments.

"Decoys," she said to me with a grin.

Me you must picture with my red hair frizzed to a fare-you-well, and my face made up like the American flag, wearing a showy hat, a smartly cut caracul coat and high-heeled satin slippers. The make-up robbed my face of all character, and I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked to the life the expensive, empty-headed woman that you may find on upper Broadway in her hundreds. But I doubted my ability to run in those high-heeled slippers.

"Then kick 'em off," said Mme. Storey. "It will add a picturesque touch to the story."

We continued uptown to the flat on West —— Street, where we found our three men waiting for us, all smartly rigged out according to the custom of the modern gunman, all cool and smiling. The youngster in particular seemed to regard it as a great lark.

I could almost have hated them all for their unconcern. I wished myself anywhere but there. Mme. Storey dealt out guns to all. They were loaded with blanks. Mine went into a specially prepared pocket of my fur coat.

Inspector Rumsey came to us here for a final consultation.

"How about the Fossbergs?" asked Mme. Storey. "Do you think they will play their parts satisfactorily?"

"I haven't a doubt of it?" said the inspector dryly. "They couldn't be in a worse state of funk if they expected to be robbed in earnest. I persuaded them to stay away from the store until just before you came, so their clerks wouldn't get on to anything."

"And the guns?"

"It's the custom of the store to keep four loaded guns in different places under the counter. These were collected yesterday and sent to the makers to be cleaned and inspected."

I thought, with a shiver: How does he know but that one of the clerks may have a gun of his own? However, there was nothing to be gained by bringing that up then, and I kept my mouth shut.

"What are the police arrangements?" asked Mme. Storey.

"According to your instructions, I did not attempt to interfere with them," returned the inspector. "I have taken nobody in the department into my confidence. There is a man on fixed post on Broadway two blocks south of the store, and another stationed in the little park three blocks north. These men are far enough away not to interfere with you, but you must be careful not to drive past them, or they might shoot if they hear the alarm.

"In addition there are two patrolmen whose beats meet in the middle of the street alongside the store. You will have to watch for these. After they have met and gone back you can depend upon about twelve minutes before they return. Don't forget that there are many men on fixed post along Riverside Drive."

"We will keep off the Drive," said Mme. Storey dryly.

The final arrangements were that we were to proceed to the Fossberg store separately; Abell in the car was to wait in the side street near the corner of West End Avenue with his engine running; the rest of us were to walk up and down, keeping in sight of each other, until the two policemen had met.

Two minutes after the policemen had gone back Mme. Storey was to enter the store, and I was to take up my position at the door, glancing up and down the street as if I was waiting for somebody. Abell and Farren were then to be looking in the window. Two minutes after Mme. Storey had entered they were to follow her into the store.

"Well, good-by and good luck," said Inspector Rumsey, smiling. "I must say it seems like a mad scheme to me; but I have had too many lessons in the past to venture to oppose any plan of Mme. Storey's."

A few minutes later four of us were separately strolling up and down outside Fossberg's store. I was thankful for the rouge which covered my pale cheeks. However, we were not in the least conspicuous on the well filled sidewalk.

A policeman passed, swinging his club, without looking twice at us. In the side street, down near the end of the short block, I could see the car waiting; a touring car, with the top down in true bandit fashion. It was a "stolen" car, too, to add verisimilitude—stolen from one of Mme. Storey's friends, however.

Broadway uptown is an immensely wide street with grass plots down the middle.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Trees used to grow there; but nowadays they would have nothing to root in but the subway.

Both sides of the way are filled in with immense and expensive apartment houses with entrances in the side streets. The Broadway level is given up to shops, not large in size, but nearly all dealing in expensive luxuries.

While it is not a fashionable street, I suppose there is as much money to the mile as in any other street in the world. The people of that neighborhood have a fat, soft look that must be tempting to a bandit.

Fossberg's, as I said before, is the finest establishment in that part of town. Only a few very choice objects are displayed in the show windows. There is but the one entrance, which is cut across the corner; at that season it was closed by a revolving door.

Inside, the four walls were lined by showcases, the tops of which served as counters; and there was in addition a square inclosure in the middle of the store, surrounded by other cases to display goods. Within this inclosure was a block of low safes, in which many valuable objects were kept.

Well, the two policemen met, exchanged a word or two, and each slowly retraced his steps. The two minutes passed; then Mme. Storey with her languid, graceful carriage went through the revolving door, and I took up my station outside it.

At this moment, when I expected to have died with terror, all fear suddenly left me. Explain it how you will, my heart rebounded; all my faculties became preternaturally sharpened; the scene of that street was bitten on my brain as if with an acid; the towering apartment houses, red electric cars, smoothly moving motor cars, well dressed people drifting up and down.

Stephens and Farren were close by, looking in one of the show windows. The former was carrying an umbrella hanging from his arm. He had his eye on the chronometer exhibited in a corner of the window to inform passers-by of the correct time. When the proper interval had elapsed they followed Mme. Storey through the revolving door.

In order not to interrupt my narrative, I will describe here what happened inside while I was waiting outside, poised like an animal ready for I knew not what.

There were eight or nine customers in the store, Mme. Storey said, mostly in couples, since people generally like to have a friend along when they are choosing costly objects. There were five clerks on duty. Mr. Benjamin Fossberg ought to have been waiting to receive my mistress, but he and his brother were both too nervous to show themselves openly. They watched the preliminaries from their office at the back.

Mme. Storey went to the center inclosure. She had waited a moment or two for a clerk. In the meantime her two men entered; Stephens turning to the left, where watches were displayed, and Farren making his way toward a case of jeweled cufflinks.

Mme. Storey told the clerk who came to her that she wanted a diamond ring. She affected not to be able to decide whether she wanted three diamonds in a marquise setting, or an emerald with a diamond on each side. We knew that the most valuable rings were kept in a certain safe, and her object was to make him open it. She said her clerk was an exquisite young gentleman like a model for a clothier's advertisement, and it was a shame to frighten him so rudely.

When he had opened the safe and brought a small velvet lined tray of rings to lay before Mme. Storey, he found himself looking into the stubby barrel of her automatic. His face turned as white as the starched collar he wore; his eyes started from his head; no sound escaped him but a little throaty gasp.

"Fetch out all the trays from that safe and put them on the counter," said Mme. Storey quietly.

Like a man in a dream he started to obey, reaching blindly for the trays while he kept his terrified eyes fixed on the gun. As he put the trays on the counter, Mme. Storey, always keeping him covered, with her free hand coolly emptied the contents on the square of velvet which covered the glass counter and put the trays to one side.

So quietly was all this done that several

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the trays had been brought out and emptied before anybody else in the store got on to what was happening. Then a woman customer on the other side of the center inclosure caught sight of Mme. Storey's gun. A low, terrified cry broke from her, and instantly everybody in the store took alarm.

Stephens and Farren then slipped forward with their guns out, one on one side of her, one on the other. Standing back to back, they commanded the whole store between them.

"Keep still or I shoot!" growled Stephens.

"If you move a step I'll plug you!" added the boy.

There was no other sound, they said, except the hoarse breathing of the terror-stricken men and women. Everybody was frozen where they stood.

In sheer panic the two proprietors had dropped down behind the office partition. Stephens described to me the semicircle of still, ghastly faces that remained turned toward him.

There was one fat, overdressed woman in a near-seal coat, whose lips moved continually. But whether she thought she was gabbling a prayer or beseeching Stephens to spare her life, he never knew, because no sound escaped her.

There were only three persons on Farren's side of the store. None moved. Mme. Storey meanwhile continued to concentrate on the clerk who was serving her.

"Move sharp!" she said, raising the gun a little.

He dumped the remaining trays on the counter in a heap. Mme. Storey deliberately emptied them. There was now a glittering, sparkling mound of rings on the square of velvet.

Mme. Storey picked up the corners of the square, one after another, and, giving the sack a twirl which confined the contents in a ball, dropped it into her hand bag. She then started to back toward the door, the two men covering her retreat.

During all this I was playing my part outside. Immediately after Stephens and Farren went in a woman entered, and I made no attempt to stop her; but when, a moment or two later two more women came along, according to instructions I attempted to hold them in conversation. I asked for information about vacant apartments in the neighborhood.

It is a fruitful subject, and I detained them without difficulty until out of the corner of my eye I saw Mme. Storey backing toward the door. You must remember that all this happened in much less time than it takes to tell it.

I gave the revolving door a push to facilitate my mistress's exit. She came out, the gun already hidden. Farren followed, then Stephens.

There was no appearance of hurry. Stephens slyly dropped his umbrella in such a fashion that the revolving door jammed on it, and stuck. These doors will only turn in one direction, you know.

My last impression was of white faces inside, and fists beating on the glass; and the two foolish women that I had been talking to, vainly pushing at the door to get in. They had no idea of what had happened.

The people inside were shrieking at them, and pointing down toward the jammed umbrella. But the two women never got it; they only looked indignant.

Meanwhile we four walked rapidly, but with perfect sedateness toward our waiting car. There was never any need for me to kick off the satin slippers.

Just as we were getting into the car, the clerks broke out of the store with a roar; but in a jiffy we were around the corner and bowling down West End Avenue at thirty miles an hour. Conditions were just right; there was enough traffic in the street to conceal us, and not enough to hold us up. The pursuit never came within sight or sound of us.

We kept right on down West End Avenue past the point where it becomes plain Eleventh Avenue, and scattered at Forty-Second Street, leaving the "stolen" car to be found by the police in due course.

Such was out first holdup. I expect you will smile at me, just as my mistress did, but I felt disappointed at the outcome, it seemed so easy. After getting so tremendously wrought up as I did at the last

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moment I required more excitement to satisfy me.

"It will do for a beginning," said Mme. Storey cryptically. "If we appeared to get along too well without outside help, it would only be to defeat our own purpose."

VI.

You can imagine with what eagerness I searched the newspapers next morning. Once more I was disappointed.

It appeared that while we were turning our trick at Fossberg's, the famous Bobbed-Hair Bandit had been conducting a sensational raid on the pay roll of a factory in Brooklyn. She got a whole column and a half whereas they only gave us a couple of short paragraphs tacked on to the end of her story.

According to this account which had been given out by one of the clerks, he and his mates had put up a bold resistance, and had succeeded in driving us off with only a trifling loss to the establishment. These lies made me good and sore.

Why, the value of the rings taken by Mme. Storey was upward of fifty thousand dollars. I experienced the psychology of a real gunman. I felt that we had been cheated of our due.

Mme. Storey was highly amused when I voiced my feelings.

"Oh, never mind the general public," she said soothingly; "if we get credit among our professional friends at the Boule' Miche', it will be more to the point."

That night Benny Abell was sent on ahead to the resort to act as a sort of advance agent for the company. We were to join him there after midnight.

The Boule' Miche' calls itself a "club," of course, though it hangs out a glittering electric sign to the street. Only "members" are admitted upon presentation of their cards. It is not difficult to get one's self elected.

The entrance is ingeniously protected by a series of dressing rooms and lobbies swarming with employees. Beyond is the restaurant proper, consisting of three large rooms, all done in a florid rococo style with slashings of gilt scroll work.

In the center of each room a little fountain throws up a jet of water with colored lights playing upon it. At this time the place was enjoying a wonderful run of prosperity owing, no doubt, to the widespread connections of the genial proprietor.

Pretty soon Bat Bartley would sell out and the Boule' Miche' blossom out under a new proprietor and a new name. For obvious reasons none of these places lasts long.

As soon as we took our seats in the principal room, it became apparent that Abell had done his work well. Those whom we had spotted as the shady habitués of the place bore themselves toward us with an increased respect.

In particular Bat Bartley was even more supple and suave than usual. He came hurrying up to ask with a meaning air if we would like a private room that night.

"I do my best to keep out the wrong sort of persons," he said, "but once in awhile they will get by." He was referring to agents of the police.

"No, thanks," said Mme. Storey with her cool smile. "I enjoy watching the crowd. Nobody is looking for us yet."

Bat Bartley laughed as if she had made an excellent joke. As a matter of fact, no descriptions of us had been published; and we had learned through Inspector Rumsey that the clerk at Fossbergs' had been incapable of furnishing the police with working descriptions.

"Well, anyhow," said Bartley with a wink, "have a bottle of cider on the house."

This beverage, which was served from a plain bottle, unless I miss my guess, originated in a cellar of Reims.

Abell did not remain with us continuously, but visited his acquaintances through the rooms as occasion offered. By and by he brought one of them up to our table.

"Meet my friend, Mr. Tinker," he said, "you know, Muggsy Tinker between friends."

It was a comical figure. He had the look of a little boy who had become middle-aged without growing up.

He had a boy's curly pate now streaked with gray, and a schoolboy's sheepish smile, though his face was seamed and wrinkled.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A large, staring glass eye which matched very ill with its little twinkling mate added to the peculiarity of his appearance.

He was wearing the conventional dinner coat, but would have looked more at home in a rough jacket with a dirty handkerchief around his neck.

"Please' to meet yeh. Please' to meet yeh," he said, grinning affably all around. He sat down and accepted a glass of cider.

"I've heard of you," said Mme. Storey. "You and Buck Millings used to work together years ago."

"That's right. That's right," he said, greatly pleased. "Buck and me pulled off many a job together. He was an A-1 partner. They don't make his like nowadays. Poor Buck, he met his end under a freight train in the Joliet yards. To think of anybody remembering them days! We used to hear of you then, ma'am. Oh, yes, you was famous. Way out of our class. You for the classy kid glove work, us for the rough!"

Mme. Storey toasted him with her glass.

Mr. Tinker, without saying anything plainly, went on to let us know that he had heard of our exploit of the day before, and highly commended it.

"Say, that was pulled off in a real big style," he said. "It was just what you'd expect of Kate Arkledon."

"Just a beginning," said Mme. Storey with a casual air.

"Say, the papers gave you a rotten deal on that," he went on. "It made me sore. A brilliant piece of work like that ought to get proper credit."

My heart quite went out to the little man for his sympathy.

"Oh, well, we're not looking for publicity," said Mme. Storey.

The little man gave her a sharp look.

"Oh, I don't know," he replied. "Times have changed."

The talk drifted away to other matters. After awhile he said, apropos of nothing that had gone before: "You ought to see Jake."

"Jake who?" asked Mme. Storey with an idle air.

"I don't know his proper name. We just call him Jake the Canvasser."

"Whom does he canvass for?"

"Oh, his organization," said Muggsy vaguely.

I pricked up my ears at that.

Mme. Storey refused to betray any interest in this Jake; but Muggsy returned to the subject of his own account. "Jake may have a proposition to put up to you. You ought to talk to him. He's an A-1 feller."

"What sort of proposition?"

"Oh, let him name it to you himself. You'll find him better than his word. We all deals with Jake. He earns his commission all right, and then some."

"I know these Jakes," said Mme. Storey scornfully. "They belong to the family of bloodsuckers. They live off us who do the work and take the risk."

Muggsy wagged his hand back and forth. "No, no," he said, "you get this wrong. Jake ain't no common receiver. He's got a new proposition. Up-to-date."

"Oh, I guess I can run my business without him," said Mme. Storey.

An ugly look appeared in Muggsy's face. "You'll find you gotta deal with Jake," he said. "We all do. The service that Jake supplies is for the benefit of all, and all are expected to pay their share. Nachelly, if anybody tried to profit by Jake's service without puttin' up for it, it would make the crowd sore."

"I'll hear what he has to say," said Mme. Storey, coolly.

"Times has changed, ma'am," said Muggsy meaningly. "It used to be everything was individuality, but nowadays it's organization. You can't do nothin' without organizing. Either you gotta climb aboard the band wagon, or the wheels will sure go over yeh!"

VII.

On the following evening the redoubtable Jake turned up at the Boule' Miche' in person. Bat Bartley brought him to our table. He was as smooth as a well-whipped mayonnaise.

In appearance he was the prosperous business man—well, not quite, for the marvelously cut blue suit, a little lighter in color than men usually wear, the pale pink

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shirt and tie of a darker hue gave him a sporting character. He wore an immense diamond on the middle finger of his left hand.

He was more the successful theatrical manager or baseball magnate. He had one of these smooth full faces that lent themselves naturally to an unctuous smile; his handsome, dark eyes rolled and beamed mysteriously, and gave nothing away.

His first act was to order up a bottle of "cider." I found that he was always amply supplied with funds. He was driven about town by a smart chauffeur in an elegant new car of the most expensive make. He was liberal, too, in making loans to any member of "the crowd" who was out of luck.

You are not to suppose that he sat down and came out plump and plain with his proposition. By no means. A good hour was spent in laying the foundations for a beautiful friendship.

A second bottle followed the first. He made no secret of his admiration for my mistress, and in that I think he was honest. I believe he was a little astonished by her superb style after the commonplace material he was accustomed to deal with.

He entertained us with pleasant gossip of the great world. He seemed to know everybody worth knowing, and I was greatly impressed until he gave the snap away by bringing in the name of Mme. Storey.

"Oh, Rose and I are intimate friends," he said carelessly. "She owes her success to the fact that she keeps in close touch with men like me who know all sides of life. But," he added with a confidential smile, "I don't tell her too much, you bet. I look after my friends. Anybody will tell you that. Rose don't get as much out of me as I get out of her."

I wish you could have seen my mistress's innocent expression while he was getting this off. She looked like the cat who has swallowed the canary.

By insidious degrees he approached the real business in hand. He was careful never to give the plain brutal names to things.

"The organization that I represent," he explained, "has two main objects; first to advertise the business as a whole; second, to see that the individual operator gets proper recognition. You can't rise in any profession without publicity. Look at the mean way the papers used you the other day. That couldn't happen if you were in with us.

"Providing publicity to the nervy boys and girls that live dangerously," he went on, "that's our line." The phrase "live dangerously" was continually on his lips. I wondered where he had picked it up.

"Look where they stand to-day as the result of our publicity," he went on. "The police helpless, the public terror-stricken. You have only to pull your gat anywhere for every boob in the neighborhood to freeze solid. All due to intelligent publicity; to such stunts as the Bobbed-Haired Bandit. That's our stuff. That's reached such a point that we don't even have to furnish the stories any more. The papers run it spontaneously. They hand it to us."

"So it seems," said my mistress.

"But we don't stop with one stunt," he resumed. "Always something new. It was my people who staged the holdup of Mme. Storey awhile ago. That was a wow of a stunt. Just look at the publicity we got out of it. It had a tremendous moral effect. For everybody says to themselves: 'My God! If they can get away with that what chance have *we* got?' And they give up without a struggle!"

Here a certain compunction appeared to attack him, and he assumed a deprecatory tone.

"Of course, I told you just now that Rose Storey was my friend, and so she is in a manner of speaking. I know her well, but she ain't a real friend, like. She only goes with me for what she thinks she can get out of me, so I don't feel under any obligations to her. I just go her one better. That's fair, ain't it?"

"Absolutely," agreed my mistress. "By the way, who pulled off that trick?"

I kept my eyes on my plate during this amazing scene. I distrusted my own powers of dissimulation.

"Two young fellows that I'm bringing out," said Jake. "Falseface Petro and Tony Lanza."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Falseface? How did he get that name?"

"Because he can make his face like a wax mask. He gives nothing away. It's worth a fortune in our business."

"Sure!"

"Oh, those lads have a future before them," commented Jake. "They're young yet, but they're bound to rise."

"I'd like to meet them," said Mme. Storey carelessly. "Perhaps they'd be willing to work work with me."

"They'd jump at the chance," said Jake. "A woman of your reputation. I'll bring them up some night."

"Well, tell them who I am, and what I've done," said Mme. Storey indifferently. "I can't be explaining myself to kids."

Jake enlarged upon his organization.

"In addition to publicity," he said, "we have a special advisory department to investigate likely plants and furnish our subscribers with full information. In that case all you got to do is to go and turn your trick, knowing that everything is all right. That costs more, of course."

"I would prefer to investigate my own plants," Mme. Storey told him.

"Sure, sure," he said obsequiously; "a person of your experience. We are also prepared to furnish suggestions for big, spectacular stunts, good for a column or more of space, and beside that we run a press clipping bureau."

"Press clippings?" repeated Mme. Storey, elevating her eyebrows.

"Sure. Every operator, after he has covered a clever trick, wants to read what they say about it. It's valuable, too, to learn what the police are doing in his case."

"Well, I've been in the game too long," said Mme. Storey. "I'm not interested in clippings. What could you do for me?"

"Say," said Jake impressively. "I wouldn't give a person like you no hot air. You're wise. I wouldn't say a word to you about what we could do. I wouldn't ask you to pay a cent, neither. All you got to do is to let me know the place and time where you're going to pull your next trick, and we'll do the rest. The result will surprise you." His eyes gleamed appreciatively.

"Say, with a person of your style and your reputation," he went on, "there's no limit to what we could do! What a chance! What a chance! Why, we'd leave the Bob-Haired Bandit tied to the post!"

"All for nothing?" queried Mme. Storey dryly.

"You would agree if you were satisfied with the publicity to pay us our usual commission. Ten per cent of the proceeds. That's all."

"In goods?" she asked slyly.

His face hardened. "In cash. All our dealings are in cash. We don't want to interfere with your arrangements for disposing of the goods."

"I see," said Mme. Storey. "Well, look here. I'll tell you what I'll do. You ask your people to furnish me with a suggestion for a sensational stunt that will break into the headlines, and if it appeals to me I'll do business with you."

"Fine!" cried Jake. "You shall have it to-morrow night!"

Shortly after this we went home, it being then about half past two. We left Jake the Canvasser circulating from table to table amongst his customers.

The Boule' Miche' closed officially at the legal hour, but behind its darkened front the privileged guests lingered on until morning. In the midst of a gay party in the outer room I saw the face of Madge Caswell, a young woman who works for us sometimes. She has a faculty for trailing a suspect that amounts to genius.

She was there by Mme. Storey's orders, and in a fleeting glance of intelligence my mistress signified to her that Jake was her man. Madge's instructions were to spare no expense in keeping in contact with him, even if it meant hiring half a dozen assistants, but to allow him to slip at any moment sooner than risk letting him suspect he was watched.

The following night found us in our usual places at the Boule' Miche' after midnight, surrounded by the same showy and noisy crowd with flushed faces and glassy eyes. The Boule' Miche' represented a good time to these people, but they were not really having it. They whooped themselves up to it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

What a lot of time and money mortals waste in the constant pursuit of so-called pleasure!

We saw Jake the Canvasser from time to time with one party or another, but he was coy to-night and allowed a good while to elapse before he came to our table. Perhaps he wished to force Mme. Storey to send for him. But she was a better waiter than he was, and in the end he had to come of his own accord.

He sat down and entertained us with his anecdotes. My mistress would not deign to question him. Finally he said:

"—Er—I heard from my people."

"Yes?" said Mme. Storey, with perfect indifference.

Jake glanced questioningly at the rest of us.

"Oh, you may speak freely," she told him; "these people are in on everything I do."

"Well," said Jake, "the organization suggests that you go back to Fossberg's and turn a second trick. First-rate publicity in that. It will be the last place they'd expect you. If you make your second visit before the clerks have time to recover their nerve, it 'll be a walk-away!"

"Not a bad idea," said Mme. Storey, with a subtle smile.

My heart began to beat with the same old suffocating fear of the future.

VIII.

Next morning we plunged into our preparations again. We already had full information as to the plan and layout of the Fossberg store, and had now to concoct a new line of approach that would stand as good a chance of success as the old.

Bert Farren, who was sent up to make a preliminary reconnaissance, reported that the revolving door had been replaced with two pairs of swinging doors. These doors swung either way. Also, a carriage opener had been hired to stand outside.

It was obvious that he was a detective in disguise, and armed. This man seemed to me like a fatal obstacle in the way of our success, but Mme. Storey smiled when she heard about him.

"It will make the problem more interesting," she said.

We struck another snag when Inspector Rumsey approached Benjamin Fossberg with our proposition. He met with a flat refusal.

It was somebody else's turn to be the goat, Fossberg said; he and his brother had not recovered from the shock of the first hold-up. The inspector was finally forced to bring him down to our office, for Mme. Storey to exert her charm upon him.

She finally won a reluctant consent, with the stipulation that both brothers be allowed to absent themselves from the store when the stunt was pulled off. Mme. Storey had no objection to this, of course.

Fossberg pointed out that he had now no excuse to deprive the clerks of their guns.

"Then load them with blanks," said Mme. Storey. "They'll never know the difference. Let there be an exchange of shots. It will add drama to the affair."

In these preliminary discussions it soon developed that I was to be put forward this time as the principal performer. Mme. Storey could not be the first to enter the store without adding a disguise to her disguise, and this she could not do since it was necessary for the success of the affair that the clerks should recognize her in the end.

The realization of what they expected of me almost overwhelmed me, but not quite, for now I was borne up by the secret hope that when the actual moment came I should be able to play my part as well as any of them. In the meantime, though, I suffered all the torments of the damned.

This "living dangerously," as Jake termed it, was not all that it was cracked up to be.

We continued to frequent the Boule' Miche' late at night, and our prestige there was growing. Through Jake and through Bat Bartley we were gradually becoming acquainted with all the "operators" or "adventurers," as they termed themselves. Most of them were incredibly young, and all distinguished by the childish vanity which seems to be inseparable from the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

modern crook. Among them were several of the girls who alternated in the rôle of the Bobbed-Haired Bandit.

I understood that there were at least half a dozen bobbed-hair bandits. These youngsters, recognizing a great character in Mme. Storey, instinctively deferred to her. She would have made good with them, even without the infernal halo of Kate Arkledon's reputation around her head.

One of the girls quite won my heart. They called her Brownie. She was not strictly beautiful, her mouth being too wide and her blue eyes set too far apart, but she had that indefinable something which is called charm.

Her frank gayety was irresistible. It was her finest qualities which had driven her into association with these thieves—a hatred of smugness and sham. Under happier circumstances she might have adorned the highest circles.

After it was all over we tried to find this girl, but she had disappeared. Like Mayflies they enjoy their brief dance in the sun —then oblivion.

I may say here that none of these young people suffered as a result of Mme. Storey's activities in the case. It was agreed between her and Inspector Rumsey that the police must do their own work in respect to apprehending the small fry.

My mistress's interest lay with the cold-hearted man or men who remained in safety in the background, profiting by the recklessness of the young. But of course she always meant to get Falseface Petro and Tony Lanza; that she owed to herself.

My heart gave a great jump when I first saw these two enter the Boule' Miche'. Now for the acid test of our disguise, I thought, glancing at my mistress and at my own reflection in the mirror.

We had been playing our rôles for many days now, and they had become second nature to us; there was little likelihood that they would recognize us separately. True, for them to find us together added to the danger somewhat; but we were now in the midst of quite a large party, most of whom were known to Falseface and Tony as "safe."

The two young men had been told all about us, and that is the secret of a successful disguise—*i. e.,* to prepare in advance the minds of those whom you wish to deceive.

Jake brought them up to our table from behind me. I could *feel* them coming. My heart beat thickly as at the approach of a dangerous animal. Fortunately I was playing an insignificant rôle, and they scarcely deigned to notice me.

Little Tony was hailed by the crowd as a good fellow, while Falseface was greeted with more respect. The latter, though he was not now in action, still maintained his pose of inscrutability.

He stood there with a good-humored sneer, as much as to say he would permit the ladies to admire him. And the worst of it was, you couldn't help but admire him.

Conceited and empty as he was, there was power in his unnatural self-control. In that circle of grinning faces he never smiled.

It was quite thrilling to see him and Mme. Storey together. Neither would yield an inch. Each affected to ignore the other; but it was none the less evident that for these two the others at the table simply did not exist.

Neither had much to say. Mme. Storey smoked one cigarette after another, and through the haze of tobacco fumes her expression appeared even more cynical and reckless. Falseface Petro gave himself the languid, elegant airs of a celebrated screen star.

We had made room for the newcomers at our table, and the inevitable "cider" circulated. Of course in company like that we never discussed business; the talk was just as empty and meaningless as might have been heard at any table in the place. It was merely a noise.

"Well, what's the good word, Falseface?"

"Nobody's got a good word for you, Butch."

Loud laughter greeted this sally.

"Say, you're so quick you're ahead of yourself. Wait till you catch up, fella."

"If I waited for you, I'd be there yet."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Is 'at so?"

Somebody broke into song:

"My gal's a high-bawn lady;
She's dahk, but not too shady—"

"Where'd you dig that up, Brownie? That song was laid away when mother was a girl."

"I don't care. I like it."

Louder:

"Fedders lak a peacock, just as gay;
She's not cullud, she was bawn that way."

"What yeh tryin' to do, compete wit' t' orchester?"

"T' orchester ain't in it wit' me."

Fortissimo:

"Down the line they can't outshine
This high-bawn gal of mine!"

". . . Odds of sixty-four to one, and she romped home. I had a tip, too, and I wouldn't play it. I wisht somebody would kick me now."

"Hey, fellas, Tony wants somebody to kick him!"

"That's a good show down at the Booth."

"Yeah. Lee Shubert sent me a box last week."

"Yes, he did!"

". . . They're gonna call it the Sans Sowcy."

"What's 'at mean?"

"Soich me! Vincent Astor and young Morgan and all the big fellas belongs."

"Well, they're nottin' in my life."

There was dancing in the middle room, and the crowd at our table was continually breaking up and reforming in different combinations. When an opportunity presented itself Mme. Storey whispered to me to pass the word to our fellows to let us go home alone this night.

It turned out in the end that Falseface Petro was not as indifferent as he seemed. When Mme. Storey rose to leave, he got up also in his lordly way and squired us out.

Tony followed after like his shadow.

Falseface signaled a taxi at the curb.

"Can I drop you anywhere?" he drawled.

"I live in —— Street," said Mme. Storey.

The upshot was that Falseface and Tony accepted an invitation to come up for a last drink and a smoke. By this time we had thoroughly established our characters with them, and there was little chance of a discovery. But the sense of danger was always present; one could not relax for a moment.

How strange it seemed to be hobnobbing with those two sleek young savages!

Arrived in our own little flat, none of us needed to put a curb on our tongues.

"Jake told me about the stunt you pulled off at Fossberg's last week," said Falseface. "That was a damn neat piece of work."

"Oh, I was just getting my hand in after quite an extended rest," said my mistress carelessly.

"What you get out of it?"

"Twenty-five thousand. That was about half what the stuff was worth."

"It's better than I can do. Those fellows are bloodsuckers."

"You're no slouch at the game yourself," said Mme. Storey. "That was a nervy stunt you pulled in Mme. Storey's office. I like to see a woman like that get it. She's too big for her shoes, she is."

"If you've got the nerve they can't stop you!" said Falseface, pluming himself.

"Sure. That's the principle I've always gone on."

"Me and you ought to be in on something together," he said with an elaborate show of indifference.

"Suits me," said my mistress. "We're going to pull a big stunt next week. Going back to Fossberg's to make a second clean-up. There will be good publicity in it this time."

"Well, Tony and me's got nothing on next week," said Falseface carelessly.

"I could use a couple more men if they were the right sort," said Mme. Storey. "I take a third; I'll give you a quarter; and the rest divide what's left. There won't be but six or seven of us in it."

"We're on," said Falseface, without troubling to consult his partner.

"All right," said Mme. Storey. "Be

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here at nine to-morrow night to meet the crowd and talk things over. We'll go on to the Boule' Miche' after."

IX.

THE affair was first set for Wednesday afternoon of the following week. On Tuesday Inspector Rumsey came into our office in a state of perturbation.

He had just learned that the captain of the precinct in which Fossberg's was situated had made a shift, and that thereafter there would be an officer on fixed post in the middle of Broadway, immediately in front of the jewelry store.

"Of course I could have given him a tip to put it off until after to-morrow," said the inspector, "but you told me most particularly not to interfere with the local police arrangements."

"Quite so," said my mistress. "If you told the captain to put it off, and then the robbery took place to-morrow, the cat would be out of the bag. And we're not yet ready to release that cat."

"But what will you do?" asked the inspector. "You can't make a get-away with an armed policeman outside the door."

"We'll make a new plan," said Mme. Storey calmly. "Speaking of cats, there's more than one way of skinning them."

"That makes two men outside the door," he said in distress.

"Well," rejoined my mistress, smiling, "there's a back door."

To give us time to discuss the details of the new plan, and to rehearse our parts, the affair was put off until Saturday at ten thirty. On Saturday mornings the volume of business is about the same as the afternoons of other days. On the afternoon of Saturday we feared there would be too great a crowd for our comfort.

I was relieved to discover that in the new plan I was not called upon to play so dangerous a part. We were all to enter the store simultaneously.

Abell was released from any participation in this holdup, much to his joy. There was no glamour about it for him. That left six of us to conduct the actual operation.

The gang was completed by a dandy chauffeur borrowed by Mme. Storey from a wealthy friend. The car "stolen" for the occasion was an elegant new limousine.

On Saturday morning at nine we met at the flat. I was in a miserable state of funk. I hope I succeeded in concealing it.

Mme. Storey served out the guns, and she herself made sure that Falseface and Tony were not carrying any additional weapons. They protested against the blank shells, but our leader stood firm.

"Our object is robbery, and not murder," she said coolly. "If you are obliged to shoot, the blanks will go off with just as much noise and have the same moral effect. And if there is any slip-up in our plans, you won't land in the death chamber."

They appeared to see the force of her argument.

We left the flat separately. It fell to my part to ride uptown in the elegant car with the dandy chauffeur.

But I was in no condition to enjoy all this grandeur. My knees trembled, my hands were clammy, my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. I wore a close hat which completely hid my red hair, and certain changes had been made in my facial decorations.

On the first occasion the clerks at Fossberg's could not have had but the briefest glimpse of me; still there was a possibility of my face having been photographed on somebody's mind, and we were not taking any chances.

Two blocks below the store I halted in order to make sure that I was not arriving too soon. Mme. Storey came to the car door as if to greet an acquaintance.

"All here," she said cheerfully. "Give us two minutes, then drive on, and go ahead with the program. Do not look about for us as you are entering the store."

"How about the two policemen on beat?" I asked.

"You can disregard them to-day."

When I drove up in front of Fossberg's in my fine car, the door opener hastened to help me out. As I stepped down I made believe to stumble, and allowed a little cry of pain to escape me.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, my ankle!"

The man caught hold of my arm to support me. "Will you get back in your car?" he asked.

"No, let him drive on," I said. "I will sit down in the store for a moment."

He helped me across the sidewalk. This trick was to draw him inside the store, you understand.

I was half paralyzed with fear. He must have felt how my arm was trembling; but I suppose he ascribed it to the pain I was suffering.

Inside the store, a clerk made haste to push up a chair, and I sank into it. In a glance I saw that the place was fairly well filled, and then things began to happen.

As the door opener left me to return to his post, he found himself facing Falseface, Tony, and young Farren, who had entered behind me, each with a gun in his hand. Instinctively the doorkeeper's hand went toward his pocket; but at a harsh command from Falseface, he thought better of it, and flung his hands above his head.

In a twinkling Tony had disarmed him. Behind them, in the space between the two pairs of doors, Mme. Storey was coolly bolting the outside doors, and pulling down the shades. To the glass of the door she affixed a little notice which had been prepared in readiness:

"Closed on account of death in the family."

Stephens had been sent around through the apartment house to cut off the escape of anybody who might try to get out by the rear door of the store. This door opened into the lobby of the apartment house.

For the moment I remained sitting where I was. All fear left me, and I seemed to be able to see all round my head.

Mme. Storey joined the three men, and the four of them spread out, and advanced across the store like skirmishers. When they came abreast of me, I fell into line with them.

A strange silence filled the place. Then Mme. Storey ordered everybody, clerks and customers, over to the far side out of our way, and they scurried like rats at her bidding.

The human creature is not a pretty object when he is in the grip of terror. Over in the corner they struggled insanely to get behind each other.

Never will I forget the sight. There was one big woman squeaking in terror, and struggling with all her might. In spite of her struggles, one of the men clerks, who had her by the elbows, continued to hold her in front of him.

Another clerk, instead of following the crowd, silently dropped out of sight behind the counter on my left. I knew he had a gun back there, though it was loaded with blanks. I told Mme. Storey about him.

"Well, if he sticks his head over the counter, blow it off," she said harshly, loud enough for him to hear.

Nobody but me could hear the faint ring of laughter in her voice. She was enjoying herself.

A third clerk slipped out through the office at the back, but we were not concerned about him. Presently he reappeared, walking backward, stepping high, and holding his hands above his head. Stephens followed, covering him with his gun.

Mme. Storey ordered Stephens to dislodge the man behind the counter. As Stephens looked around the counter, the clerk fired.

Low, terrified cries broke from the people across the store. My own heart failed me at the sound of the explosion, though I knew it was all a comedy.

Stephens did not return his fire, but flung himself upon the clerk, and dragged him out of his hiding place. At the back of the store there was a tall safe with the door standing open. Stephens flung his man inside, and closed the door.

Meanwhile Falseface, Tony, and I had made for the safes in the center of the store. Each of us was provided with big pockets inside the skirts of our coats. I had the combination of each of these four safes, but they were not called for since all stood open.

Dropping on our knees, we began to pour the contents of the trays into our pockets. Such a cascade of glittering necklaces, pins, bracelets and rings!

While I worked, I could see Mme. Storey out of the tail of my eye, helping to cover

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the cowering crowd in the far corner. Without lowering her gun, she took a tiny cigar from the breast pocket of her neat jacket, and, sticking it in her mouth, lit a match with her thumb nail. I think this display of coolness intimidated our victims as much as the guns.

It took us but a minute or two to empty the safes. We did not bother with the show case stuff.

Coming out from behind the counter we made for the rear door. Mme. Storey and the other two men backed slowly toward us.

Then from the midst of the crowd they were covering somebody fired, and instantly pandemonium broke loose. Whipping out their guns involuntarily, Falseface and Tony returned the fire as fast as they could shoot.

Nobody could be hurt, of course; but from the shrieks and yells which rose, you would have thought that every shot had found its mark. Somebody was shoved through a show case with a horrifying crash.

As we backed through the office, a loud pounding was heard on the street door. We had not a moment to lose. Somehow, we found ourselves in the lobby of the apartment house, and got the door closed.

It was quiet there. The door closed with a spring lock, and opened inward toward the store. There was no means of fastening it from the outside; but Stephens had brought a long, thin bar for the purpose. When this was laid obliquely across the door, caught inside the handle, the ends projected beyond the door frame; and those inside were unable to pull the door toward them.

I say it was quiet in the lobby, and the way clear. The door from the street was locked, and Stephens, upon first entering, had bound and gagged the elevator attendant, and had thrown him in a little office alongside the entrance.

To be sure, the door of one of the rear apartments opened, and a white face showed for a moment, but we had nothing to fear from this direction. The door was quickly slammed again.

We crowded into the elevator. Stephens knew how to operate it. The last thing we saw, as we shot upward, was a crowd of people headed by a policeman turning in from the sidewalk toward the street door.

My knees weakened at the sight of the bluecoat. A policeman is such an obstinate fact to face.

On the top landing a couple of people were waiting for the elevator. They fell back in affright as we poured out. We ran up the final flight of stairs to the roof.

I should explain that this apartment house was one of a pair exactly alike, which occupied the whole block fronting on Broadway. All we had to do therefore was to run across the roof, and descend into the twin house, whose entrance was in the next cross street. The door from the roof was armed with a bolt on the inside, and this we shot as we passed through.

In such a state of excitement, one's instinct was to run right down through the house; but Mme. Storey would not permit it. She feared that the noise of our descent might alarm somebody below, and result in our being cut off.

She forced us to wait on the top landing for the elevator. Oh, but it was hard to wait with one's nerves jumping!

The elevator came at last. As we were getting in, we heard running feet on the roof, and fists began to pound on the door we had bolted. The negro elevator boy looked at us terrified, and hesitated.

Mme. Storey, smiling, took out her gun, and affected to examine it. The boy's black face turned gray with terror, and he took us down in a hurry. Not a word was spoken.

We issued out of the house without any appearance of hurry. Our elegant limousine was waiting at the door with the engine running. The alarm had not yet penetrated into this street.

We could see people running down Broadway. Mme. Storey was the last of us to get in the car.

As she pulled the door after her, the people running down Broadway stopped, and a crowd came pouring around the corner from the other direction. They were headed by a policeman with a gun in his hand. They were not in any too great a hurry, though.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They stopped to reconnoiter prudently. I was looking out of the rear window of the limousine. As the policeman raised his arm I dropped.

We roared away down the street. The policeman sent a couple of shots after us, while I made myself small. However, they went wide. We turned the corner on two wheels; turned another corner and slowed down.

We were safe. Away from the actual scene nobody would ever have suspected that handsome car with its dandy chauffeur of having taken part in a holdup.

When I realized that we were really safe, I suddenly dissolved in weakness. I seemed to lose all grip, all control of myself. Simultaneously perspiring and shivering in an agony of after-fear, I groaned to myself: Never again! Never again!

At Eighty-Sixth Street we turned east, and making our way through the park by the transverse road, abandoned the car in Yorkville, and scattered. As Mme. Storey and I made our way decorously down Madison Avenue, all that had happened seemed like a dream. However, the weight of jewelry bumping against my knees reminded me that it was no vision.

My mistress went into a drug store to telephone. With a grin in my direction, she left the door of the booth open a crack, and I heard this astonishing conversation:

"Is this Fossberg's jewelry store? . . . This is the lady who just held you up . . . Held you up, I said. Can't you understand English? I just wanted to tell you, in case you had overlooked it, that one of your clerks is shut up in the big safe at the back of the store . . . Better let him out before he suffocates . . . Oh, that's all right. Don't mention it. Good-by."

X.

By two o'clock the first brief accounts of the affair were on the streets. The late afternoon editions carried the complete story. And it was a story!

As a feature we had no competition that day. Jake the Canvasser had certainly delivered the goods. Mme. Storey and I read the newspapers, chuckling.

It appeared that the chief source of information was a customer (!) who happened to be in the store at the time. The clerks, as before, were too flustered to give a coherent account of what had happened.

I shall not give the newspaper story in full since I have already described what happened. The best part of the story was that it was true, except for certain artistic details added by the narrator. As when he said he heard the bandits address their leader as "Duchess."

There was a clever touch! The soubriquet stuck, of course; we never appeared in the newspapers after that but Mme. Storey was termed the Duchess, or the Duchess-Bandit.

What a marvelous thing is publicity! Only start it once, and it rolls up like a snowball. Every day some new story of the Duchess's exploits appeared.

People claimed to have seen her here, there, everywhere. Moreover, the newspapers all carried indignant editorials asking what was the matter with the police that such things were allowed to go on. That was good publicity, too.

In that first story every possible detail concerning Mme. Storey was played up; her elegant appearance, her extraordinary coolness, the humorous remarks that she addressed to her trembling victims. The fact that it was our second descent on the place was not omitted.

Fantastic were the accounts of the loot we had secured. It appeared that so far as the more valuable part of the stock was concerned, Fossberg's was completely cleaned out. In point of magnitude it was the greatest jewel robbery that had ever taken place in New York.

Two policemen added their quota to the story. Officer James Crear said:

"I was on fixed post at the corner of Broadway and —— Street about ten thirty this morning, when a fellow ran over to me, and said there was something wrong in Fossberg's jewelry store on the corner. Said he heard shooting and yelling inside as he passed by. So I ran over there, and I found the store closed, and a notice on the door reading: 'Closed on account of death in the family.'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I thought this was funny, because I had seen folks going in and out just a few minutes before. I could hear a racket inside, and I rapped on the door with my stick. Pretty soon it was opened by one of the clerks, who was so scared he couldn't tell a straight story. But I understood there had been a holdup, and the bandits were making their way out through the apartment house lobby in the rear of the store.

"I ran around outside to the door of the apartment house. It was locked. I forced it, and inside I found the elevator boy tied up and gagged. He told me the gang had gone up in the elevator. I ran up the stairs after them. They went over the roof, and down through the adjoining apartment house. They bolted the roof door after them, and I lost more time forcing it. When I got down to the street they were out of sight."

Officer William Rohrback said: "I was patrolling the west side of Broadway at —— Street, when I heard Officer Crear rap for assistance. I was two blocks away from his post. When I got there I found a crowd milling around Fossberg's jewelry store. I was told that a holdup had taken place and that the bandits had gone upstairs in the apartment house, and with the help of Officer Regan, who had also run up, we put a watch at every exit from the house.

"The janitor came up and told me there was a way over the roof into the adjoining house, so, leaving the others on watch, I ran around into the next street. When I turned the corner, I saw a woman getting into a limousine car. It was such an elegant looking outfit I hesitated; but when it started down the street at forty miles an hour or better, I fired three shots in the air. The car failed to stop."

The "customer" in Fossberg's who supplied the real story to the reporter had this to say about the Duchess:

"She was a woman of about forty-five, but well preserved. Must have been a beauty in her youth. In figure still as slender and active as a young woman. She looked more like one of those fashionable dames than a bandit; and more like Park Avenue than Upper Broadway; the real thing. She had the hardest boiled face I ever saw on a woman. I mean by that, she meant business. A desperate character. I wouldn't have thought of opposing her.

"As she was standing squarely in front of me all the time we were herded over at the side of the store, I had plenty of time to size her up. She looked at us as if we were dirt under her feet. The most striking features about her were her eyes, the pupils of which closed up to mere slits, like a cat's eyes in daylight. It gave her a terrible look."

You see how cleverly he blended fact and fiction.

An amusing outcome of the affair was, that two days later a committee of West Side merchants waited upon Mme. Storey in her office, and did their best to persuade her to take the job of running down the Duchess. My mistress smilingly declined.

But I am getting a little ahead of my story. On the night of the hold-up we telephoned ahead to the Boule' Miche' asking for a private room. Such detailed descriptions of all of us had been published, it was no longer prudent to appear in the general room. We entered by a side door, and were taken upstairs by a private stairway.

In the "Diamond Room," as they called it, we held a sort of reception, which lasted half the night. Everybody "in the know"—that is to say, every shady character who frequented the place, came up to congratulate us. Our fame was great in the underworld; the Duchess had thrown the Bobbed-Hair Bandit in the shade.

When Jake the Canvasser came to us that night, what an exchange of compliments took place! For once Jake lost his cagey air; enthusiasm carried him away. He held Mme. Storey's hand in both of his, and gazed in her face like a lover.

"Finest thing I ever heard of!" he said. "Finest thing I ever heard of! You're the queen of them all!"

"I had A-1 support," she said, including us all in her glance.

"Are you satisfied with the way we handled it?" asked Jake. "Of course, there'll be a lot of new stuff in the morning papers."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"More than satisfied!" said my mistress. "The man who got up that story was a genius!"

"Of course, we put our best man on it," said Jake. "I may say he is a well-known literary guy, who just does this on the side. But at that, he couldn't have done a thing if you hadn't given him the stuff to work on. Say, that notice, 'Closed on account of death in the family,' and the little cigar, and that trick of lighting a match with your thumbnail while you kept the crowd covered; that was better than anything he could invent."

"Oh, I don't know," she said, not to be outdone; "that name he hung on me, 'the Duchess,' that was a masterstroke. To a professional person a good name is more than half the battle. And that touch about the cat's eyes; it couldn't have been bettered. I hope your people are pleased with the way we pulled the thing off."

"I haven't had any communication with them yet," said Jake, "but I know they must be. In fact, the affair reflects credit on both sides. It shows that we were just waiting for each other; you feel that, don't you?"

"I'll never make a move without consulting you," she said.

Later, Jake contrived to get all outsiders out of the room, so that he could talk business with my mistress.

"Have you any notion what the stuff is worth?" he asked eagerly.

In respect to this matter, Mme. Storey intended to string Jake along as far as she could, of course.

"Not yet," she told him. "I've got good people working for me, and the stuff is all in their hands. But there's so damn much of it it'll take a while for the market to absorb it. They have paid me twenty-five thousand on account. I brought yours."

It was paid over in twenty-five crisp hundred dollar bills. I may say that this money was not marked. In dealing with men so astute as Jake and his employers, it would have been too risky. But we had the numbers of the bills, of course, and hoped to be able to trace them by that means.

Jake put away the money.

"Well, how about our next grandstand play?" he said, rubbing his hands.

"Oh, give us a chance," laughed Mme. Storey.

"Oh, there's no desire to overwork you," said Jake, in his oily way; "no, indeed! But we mustn't miss the psychological moment, either. This thing that we've started will run along for a week or ten days without any help from us. They'll all be workin' to hand us publicity. But when she begins to slack off, that's the time we've got to strike again, and strike hard in a new quarter. And we've got to be ready."

In my mistress's eyes I could read the determination: Not if I can help myself! But Jake could not see that. For all her cool and careless airs, Mme. Storey was fully aware of the terrible risks we ran in staging these affairs, and she had no intention of attempting fate any oftener than was absolutely necessary.

"Well, it's no harm to talk over what we're going to do," she said carelessly. "I'm always open to suggestions."

With the lines we had out, we hoped to have Jake and the men who were back of him lodged behind the bars before another such affair could be made ready. But in this, as you will see, we were disappointed.

XI.

In order to avoid repetition, I will combine the gist of several of Madge Caswell's reports into one.

For a number of years, she said, Jake the Canvasser has been a widely-known character throughout the white light district of Broadway. He passes there as Jake Golden, which is his right name. He has two brothers, prosperous manufacturers, and belongs to a widespread family connection, with which he keeps in close touch.

None of these people have any reason to suspect his association with the criminal world. Indeed, so open and aboveboard appears his whole life, that even after watching him for two weeks, I should not have succeeded in turning up anything suspicious, had it not been for the information you gave me in the beginning.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He passes on Broadway as a "sporting character," i. e., a man who makes his living by promoting and backing sporting events and theatrical enterprises. As a matter of fact, he has various small interests in these lines, but not anywhere near enough to support him in the lavish style in which he lives. He has a comfortable apartment in the —— Hotel, one of the best in town, that he leases by the year. He has hundreds of friends in every walk of life, who believe that they know him well. The only mystery about him is, where does he get all the money he spends.

In sporting circles individuals come up and disappear with great frequency; men's memories are short, and none of Jake's present associates remember, if indeed they ever knew, that Jake Golden served a sentence in Sing Sing for swindling, some years ago. Previous to that he had been confined in the Elmira Reformatory.

I have three operatives besides myself engaged on this job. We all have a number of disguises, so there is no danger of his being struck by seeing the same face about him day after day. We have been somewhat handicapped by your instructions that we are not under any circumstances to allow him to suspect that he was being followed.

Once or twice we have had to let him slip when we seemed to be about to learn something interesting. However, it probably would not have been definite. He has his tracks too well covered. He does not yet suspect that he is being watched. It is second nature with the man to take the most elaborate precautions to keep his real business secret.

I am prepared to assert that he has not in all this time met his principal. I believe that it is the corner stone of their whole system of defense, never to meet. Every day he drops into some pay station or another to call up his principal. It is always another pay station that he calls up, and every day a different one.

It is usually a call to Newark, Paterson, Hackensack, White Plains, Flushing, Jamaica, *et cetera;* some large town on the outskirts of New York. Once or twice, by getting the next booth, we heard his conversation over the phone, or a part of it. But as the details of the affairs that he reports are already known to you, this throws no fresh light on the matter.

Two of his talks had to do with "Kate Arkledon." He has no suspicion that she is other than she seems. He merely reports what has happened since the day before, and receives his instructions. In speaking over the phone, he never names the man he is talking to. At the end of the talk he receives the number that he is to call next day. He comes out of the booth with his lips moving, as if to commit it to memory. As he never writes it down, there is no way in which we can learn that number beforehand.

On Monday last he called up — Passaic. I sent one of my boys over there as quickly as possible. It proved to be the principal drugstore of the place. Now, as it is somewhat out of the common for a man to wait around a pay station to be called up, one of the clerks happened to remember the incident. The call came in for "Mr. Wilkins," and a large, well-dressed, good-looking man of about forty-five stepped forward to take it, the clerk said. He had dark hair, dark eyes, he said; couldn't say if he was bald because he kept his hat on.

Clean shaven; gentlemanly manner; looked like a retired business man. I send you this description for what it is worth. It would fit about one hundred thousand men around New York, I suppose.

On Tuesday Golden called up St. George ——. This is the municipal ferry station on Staten Island. Got nothing there. On Wednesday it was another drugstore, this one in Flushing. We were there forty minutes afterwardr, and a clerk remembered the call coming in.

It was for "Mr. Adams." This clerk described the man who received the call as middle-aged and "funny looking." Was unable to explain just what he meant by funny-looking. Thought his eyes were blue, and that he had a heavy mustache, but couldn't swear to it. Yet it was undoubtedly the same man. Very few learn to use their eyes.

However, this clerk added one more item to our store of knowledge. After "Mr.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Adams" had finished talking he got into a fine limousine car at the door. It had a chauffeur in livery. Of course, he would have to have a car if he's going to get around from Passaic to Staten Island to Flushing day after day.

It was in sending money to his principal that Golden evinced the greatest ingenuity. Golden maintained accounts in four different banks up-town. In each place his credit was high. None of these banks were aware of his other accounts.

By splitting his business into four like this, the volume of it did not appear large enough to excite suspicion. You told me on the night of the twenty-third Golden was handed eighteen hundred dollars in cash at the Boule' Miche' by a man known as Hutch Diver, and you asked me to trace what became of this money, if this were possible.

Well, I am able to report that he deposited the money in the —— National Bank on the following morning. He puts all cash in the bank as received, so there is no use trying to get him by marked bills. He may draw it out later.

One of his favorite stunts is to buy American Express Company checks, and mail them to his principal. These checks are being more and more widely used by automobile tourists and others who do not wish to carry cash on their travels. They have to be signed when purchased, and again when cashed; but Golden's unknown principal has no difficulty in making a passable imitation of his agent's signature when he cashes the checks.

A number of these checks have been returned paid to the head office of the Express Company, and I have traced them back, but without results. Anybody will cash such checks without question; banks, hotels, stores, *et cetera*. They are for moderate amounts, consequently the transactions leave no impression on the memories of the parties who cash them.

These checks have all been returned from towns near New York, the same towns, in fact, that Golden calls up on the telephone. Another method that Golden has of transmitting money to his principal is to draw checks to bearer, and have his bank certify them. Such checks are as good as cash anywhere.

Golden mails these checks to his principal by means of the mail chute in the hotel corridor outside his apartment. As it is impossible for me to keep a man on watch in the corridor, I cannot catch him in the act of mailing them, consequently there is no way in which I can recover the envelope and get a sight of the address. I know, however, that the checks are mailed in plain envelopes, and that Golden keeps a typewriter in his room for the purpose of addressing them.

XII.

FROM the foregoing report, which embodies several of the same tenor, it will be seen that we had been brought to a stand. We were between the devil and the deep sea. We could neither go forward nor back.

Consequently, when the suggestion came through from "headquarters" that we prepare to hold up the Beauvoir Hospital on the day that the payroll was made up, we had no choice but to agree. Alas for my vow, that I would never do it again! I could not abandon my mistress. Feeling a sickness of the heart, I had to go in with the rest.

Beauvoir Hospital! In the mere naming of it you will perceive what a stupendous task we had been given. Up to this time nobody had ever thought of holding up a hospital. And Beauvoir, the great charity hospital which spreads over several city blocks, was by far the largest and the best known of them all.

With its psycopathic cases, its accidents, its victims of murderous assaults, it is continually in the news. In fact, it receives more publicity than all the other city institutions put together. Beauvoir is an essential part of the fabric of New York life.

Imagine being asked to attack such a place. Why, it is a very hive of industry, with crowds entering and leaving at all hours; police bringing in accidents cases; police sitting at the bedsides of wounded prisoners. It seemed to me like a bad joke on the part of Jake's employers.

I wondered if perhaps they had not penetrated our disguises, and were using this in-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

genious means of bringing about our downfall. But Madge Caswell's reports continued to assure us that they did not suspect us; and Mme. Storey, after a study of the problem, considered that the trick might be turned, though it was appallingly difficult.

Beauvoir, as everybody knows, is on the East River front. It consists of an ancient stone building which forms a nucleus for innumerable more or less modern wings spreading in every direction. The office of the hospital, which was our mark, is in this old building, just inside the main entrance.

There are other entrances for patients and their visitors. The main entrance is used principally by officials of the hospital, and those having business with them. Unfortunately for us, the old building fronts on a courtyard, which is overlooked by literally hundreds of windows. The grand difficulty would be to get out of that courtyard with whole skins.

You may gauge the size of the institution when I tell you that the weekly pay roll amounted to nearly seventy thousand dollars. This money was brought to the hospital every Thursday morning by armored car. In the office it was made up into pay envelopes by a force of clerks; payment to the employees was spread over the whole week.

Our attack was timed for Thursday just before noon, when the clerks would have the money spread out in the office in the act of making up the envelopes. The force consisted of a head bookkeeper, three male clerks and two women. No additional guards were employed. I suppose nobody had ever dreamed of the possibility that a hospital might be attacked.

The first thing we had to decide was whether or not to take the hospital authorities into our confidence in respect to the proposed raid. We held several anxious consultations with Inspector Rumsey upon this matter.

It appeared that the cashier, whose name was Tabor, was in full charge of all financial matters, and the inspector volunteered to sound him out. He reported later that Mr. Tabor was a testy gentleman, whose whole life had centered in Beauvoir.

He had an overwhelming sense of the dignity and importance of the institution he served, and the inspector said it would be quite useless to put up any such scheme to him. He would certainly have a fit at the bare mention of such a thing.

"Very well," said Mme. Storey coolly; "then as far as Mr. Tabor is concerned this must be a bona fide holdup."

"Suppose he puts up a fight?" asked the inspector anxiously. "He's a determined old party. He is almost certain to be armed, and perhaps his clerks also. You have a big enough risk to run from chance shots outside, without facing a point-blank fire inside. I could not permit that under any circumstances."

"Pull the right wires," suggested Mme. Storey, "and introduce a man of your own as clerk in the office."

This was done. Inspector Rumsey's man subsequently reported that there was only one gun in the hospital office.. This was an old-fashioned revolver in the drawer of Mr. Tabor's desk, which had apparently not been shot off nor cleaned in many years. It was not, however, any the less dangerous on that account.

Since Mr. Tabor made a point of being the first in the office every day and the last to leave, our agent said it was doubtful if he could secure the gun beforehand to unload it; but he guaranteed to seize it when the attack was made. We let it go at that.

It fell to my part to make the first preliminary examination of the ground. I confess I did not like it at all. Beauvoir Hospital bore too strong a resemblance to a prison.

The entrance was by a triple gateway from the street. The two narrow side gates were for visitors to the various wards, and the center gate, which was double, admitted to the courtyard and the main building.

The three gates were divided by two little buildings where guards, presumably armed, were on duty at all hours. Visitors to patients were provided with cards of admission, and it was the duty of these men to examine the cards, and set the holders on the right path.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If we took our automobile inside the courtyard, the guards had only to close the iron gates to block us. If we left our car outside, we would have to run the gantlet of the guards on foot.

I should say that the windows of the office looked out on the courtyard; the first shout from the clerks would alarm the guards. In short, it seemed to be just about as perfect a trap as could be devised. I did not like it.

There was a doorman on duty at the main entrance; but he was a doddering old fellow, incapable of putting up any serious resistance. Inside, a corridor ran right and left throughout the length of the old building. You turned to the right, and the first door on your right admitted you to the office.

It was an old-fashioned double door of solid wood; it stood open during business hours. The room was about thirty feet long, with an old-fashioned wooden counter running the length of it, topped by a brass grille some three feet high, with several wickets in it.

At one side a door made of heavy brass wire gave entrance to the clerks' inclosure. I noticed that there was no way out for them, except by this door, thence by the door into the corridor.

I had chosen a Thursday morning for this visit, and they were all busy at a long table in the middle of the room putting the money in pay envelopes. Certainly it was tempting Providence to handle their cash practically in public like that.

When I reported to Mme. Storey the difficulty of getting out past the guards, she said:

"Well, there must be other ways out of that old warren. We'll study the floor plans."

Inspector Rumsey, who was looking up the police arrangements in the neighborhood, subsequently informed us that since First Avenue had become an important motor thoroughfare, a motorcycle policeman had been assigned to patrol it; and that he spent a good part of his time standing in front of the hospital. Verily, the difficulties surrounding the adventure seemed to be pyramiding against us!

Mme. Storey said thoughtfully: "We have a reputation for originality to maintain. We must do something quite new this time. Let us dispense with a car altogether, and make our get-away by water."

XIII.

From the New York *Sphere*, January ——, 192—.

THE DUCHESS MAKES ANOTHER HAUL

Beauvoir Hospital the Victim; Loss $67,000

Boldest Robbery in History of City

"The Duchess," that most amazing criminal of modern times, played a return engagement this morning. It scarcely seems possible, but she actually succeeded in capping her own exploits; in exceeding her reputation. This time it was no mere jewelry store that was the object of her raid, but Beauvoir Hospital.

Everybody in town is asking: What next? In the teeth of all the orderlies, police and armed guards who are to be found around the hospital, she and her gang relieved the office force of the week's pay roll to the tune of sixty-seven thousand dollars, and made a clean get-away.

The crime had been carefully planned. The bandits displayed a perfect familiarity with the rambling old building. They made their way out through the rear to the bulkhead adjoining the river, and were picked up by a speedy motor boat. One of their number was wounded in the retreat, but his comrades carried him off. As usual there is no clew.

Every Thursday morning an armored car brings the money for the week's pay roll to Beauvoir Hospital. The amount averages close to seventy thousand dollars. Though the institution has doubled and quadrupled in size since those early days, the pay envelopes are still made up in the office in sight of all and sundry, just as they were twenty-five years ago. In some manner this reached the ears of the Duchess, and the inevitable happened.

At eleven forty-five this morning Emerson Tabor, the cashier of the hospital, and his five clerks were engaged upon this regular weekly task. In another fifteen minutes the money would have been locked in the safe for the noon hour. All six persons were working at a long table in the hospital office.

They were cut off from the public by a stout wooden counter running the length of the room, upon which is superimposed a heavy brass grill. The whole structure is about six feet high. Four of the clerks were filling the envelopes while Mr. Tabor and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

another checked them. There was no one else in the office at the moment except Rudolph Glassberg, of 400 West Ninety-Third Street, who had called to obtain the address of a former employee of the hospital. It was this accidental witness of the affair who was able to give the most comprehensive account of what happened.

Mr. Tabor had just told Mr. Glassberg that he had no record of the employee in question, when a tall, elegantly dressed lady entered the office. At first glance Mr. Tabor was struck by nothing unusual in her appearance, except that she was rather a fine lady to be calling at old Beauvoir. She had an envelope in her hand, which she partly extended toward him.

In a low, musical voice she asked him in what part of the building that person was to be found. As Mr. Tabor put a hand through the wicket to take the envelope, his wrist was seized in a grip of steel. The woman dropped the envelope, and from somewhere about her person whipped a pair of handcuffs.

In a trice the cashier was handcuffed to his own brass grill. He found himself looking into those baleful cat's eyes with the narrowed pupils which have been so often described.

Mr. Glassberg happened to be looking directly at the woman. He was dazed by the suddenness of her act. So was Mr. Tabor.

For a moment there was no sound. The clerks in the rear had no suspicion of anything wrong. Then Mr. Glassberg heard the woman say in her courteous, well-bred voice: "So sorry to discommode you, but I can't let you get to your gun, you know."

The cashier gave a shout of warning, and yanked at the chain; his clerks jumped up, knocking over their chairs. At that moment the rest of the gang entered swiftly and quietly from the corridor.

Mr. Glassberg tried to leave then, but was harshly ordered to remain where he was. He frankly confessed that he squeezed into the farthest corner, not daring to make a sound, nor to stir during what followed.

It was the same gang which held up Fossberg's jewelry store last month; four good looking, well dressed lads, showing none of the obvious marks of the gunman, none of them over twenty-five years old, and one a mere boy; and the showily dressed, red-haired girl who appears to be the Duchess's first lieutenant. The four men, as if performing a well rehearsed drill, leaped on the edge of the counter, and vaulted over the brass grill.

Mr. Tabor shouted to his clerk, William Hughes, to get his gun out. Another clerk, Edward Ensor, beat him to it. Ensor had only been working at the hospital for a few days. He snatched the gun out of the drawer where it was kept and fired at the oncoming bandits.

The shot went wild. Immediately two of the bandits dived, and, tackling Ensor low, flung him to the floor. He was disarmed before he could recover himself. Of the two women clerks, Miss Mary Phillips fainted dead away at the sound of the shot, while Miss Gertie Colpas dived under the table, where she kept up a continuous screaming until all was over.

Mr. Glassberg said what with the screaming of the woman, the shouting of Mr. Tabor, and his frantic efforts to free himself, the noise in the room was deafening. The bandits coolly disregarded it. No sound escaped from any of them.

Two of the men covered the clerks, while the other two producing black silk bags from under their coats, started sweeping up the money and the pay envelopes on the table. All moved as by clockwork.

When the gang entered, the Duchess coolly closed the door from the corridor. She and her woman aid took up their places one on each side of the door, ready for any one who might enter. The Duchess produced the inevitable little cigar while she waited.

Mr. Glassberg said she watched what was going on within the clerks' inclosure with a half contemptuous smile, as one might look at a second rate play. There was something about the woman's unnatural coolness that froze his very blood, he said.

As on the former occasion, the Duchess's attire expressed the very acme of elegant simplicity. She was wearing a severely cut costume of brown, which set off her slender figure to perfection. Inside the collar of the coat was wound a gayly colored silk scarf, and a handkerchief to match it, peeped out of her breast pocket.

Her hat was one of those smart little recent importations that closely outline the shape of the head. Her shoes were smart English brogues, and a pair of chamois gloves completed the ensemble.

Within a minute or so the money was gathered up, and the four men as one, leaped back upon the counter, and vaulted over the brass grill. The Duchess opened the door, and they all ran out into the corridor. Mr. Glassberg peeped around the door frame to see what became of them, but did not dare to follow.

At the entrance to the building was stationed John Staley, the doorkeeper; but as he was a man of sixty-nine, and unarmed, he could do nothing to stop the bandits. However, six or more of the husky orderlies for which Beauvoir is famous came tumbling down the stairs from the wards above, attracted by the noise.

Though these men were unarmed, they boldly ranged themselves in a line across the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

corridor to block the bandits. The latter instantly formed a flying wedge with the biggest among them, the one who resembles an Englishman, in the center, and charged, bowling the orderlies over like nine pins.

It was at this point that the bandits revealed their uncanny knowledge of the premises. Instead of turning out of the main entrance, where they would presently have run into half a dozen armed guards, they opened a door under the stairs, and charged down a concealed flight into the basement.

The basement of the old building at Beauvoir is cut up into a multitude of serving rooms: laundry, kitchen, pantries, storerooms, and the like; nevertheless, the bandits made their way out unerringly, while the orderlies who were in pursuit of them got lost. The bandits burst through the kitchen, bringing terror into the hearts of cooks and dishwashers, and ran out into the open space between the hospital and the river.

In the summer this is a pleasant grass plot. It is surrounded on three sides by tier above tier of balconies, where, in pleasant weather the patients are wheeled out to get the air.

At this season there were few patients on the balconies; but the doctors, nurses, and orderlies ran out to see what was the matter below, adding their shouts to the uproar. Several shots were fired from the balconies at the fleeing bandits, but none took effect.

They made straight across for the bulkhead alongside the river. Here they met with a check, for their boat could be seen stalled a hundred feet or so out in the stream, the mechanic working frantically to start his engine. A shout of triumph went up from the watchers on the balconies.

At this moment it was touch and go with the Duchess and her pals. Six armed guards had made their way through the hospital, and the bandits were cut off between the buildings and the river. The guards did not immediately rush them, but stood close to the building, firing as fast as they could pull the trigger.

The bandits returned their fire without effect. Finally the Englishman dropped, wounded. Heartened by the sight, the guards charged across the open space, firing as they ran.

However, by this time the motor boat had come alongside the bulkhead; the bandits leaped in pell-mell, carrying their wounded comrade, and the boat shot out into the river.

The guards continued to fire after it, but as the occupants all flung themselves into the bottom of the boat, it is not likely that any more of them were hit. In a moment they had disappeared around the end of a long pier.

The motor boat was a rakish, sharp-prowed mahogany tender of great speed. It had the look of a millionaire's plaything, and was, no doubt, stolen for the occasion, though no such loss has as yet been reported to the police. Her name had been painted out. All the observers agreed that the craft was not one which customarily frequents the East River.

Police launch A-22 is stationed in a slip immediately to the south of the hospital, and in less than five minutes she was in pursuit. But the bandit craft was already out of sight down the stream. The police launch was no match for her in speed.

They caught sight of her again off Corlear's Hook; but by that time she had been abandoned, and was already awash. When the police reached the spot she had sunk, leaving only a patch of oil on the surface. What happened to her cannot be known for certain; the police hold to the theory that she was deliberately scuttled.

Children playing in the park at Corlear's Hook told the police that they had seen the mahogany launch come alongside a waiting tug, which had presently passed on, leaving the launch to sink. The tug was too far offshore for her name to be read.

The police are questioning the captain and crew of every tug in the harbor, but it is admitted that the chance of picking up a clew by this means is a slender one. Once again the Duchess appears to have vanished into thin air.

XIV.

Such was the first account of the affair. Later editions of the newspapers only amplified and elaborated the story. While a conventional horror of the deed was expressed, you can see by reading between the lines that the ultimate effect of these stories was to glorify the daring and successful bandit.

Such is the evil effect of too much publicity. If a man becomes famous enough, thoughtless persons do not stop to inquire into the quality of his fame.

During the days that followed our gang had to lie very close, for the police were roused to a fury of activity by this "outrage." I suspect that Inspector Rumsey had a very difficult part to play, for he was put in charge of the case. Of all the force, only he and the commissioner were in on the secret.

One problem that faced us was how to return the money to the hospital without giving the whole game away. We solved it by having the same millionaire who had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loaned us his automobile on a former occasion come forward and donate to Beauvoir Hospital the sum they had lost. He got great credit for this act.

Stephens was carried to a sanatorium up in Westchester to recover from his wound, which was not a dangerous one. Falseface and Tony were sent under care of Abell to rusticate in a camp belonging to another of Mme. Storey's friends in the neighborhood of Saranac Lake.

Abell's real job, of course, was to keep them under surveillance until we were ready to order their arrest. Young Farren was sent off to amuse himself down in Florida.

Mme. Storey and I were perfectly safe working in our office every day in our own proper characters; but as she was obliged to keep in touch with Jake the Canvasser, we had to disguise our disguises for the evening. Madge Caswell's reports still held out no hope of reaching the principal through Jake, and it was necessary to take other measures.

I donned a black wig, blackened my eyebrows and lashes, made up my face dead white, and wore a pair of horn-rimmed glasses, while Mme. Storey, past mistress in the art of disguise, transformed herself into a shapeless old woman dressed in tawdry finery.

On the night following the robbery we telephoned to Bat Bartley at the Boule' Miche', and asked him to save us a private room. It would be better, we said, if we did not receive our friends that night, however safe they were. The risk was too great. But we wanted to see Jake.

Well, Jake came to us there in due course, and was much amused by our disguises. Mme. Storey paid over his share of the loot. We hated to see that good money go, but there appeared to be no help for it.

Jake was in great form. I will pass over all his fulsome praises and compliments; for you are already familiar with his style. The Duchess would become as famous as Jesse James, he said, a national hero. The crown of courage had passed to a woman. And so on.

My mistress let him run on until he said something to the effect that all of us would have to do some hard thinking in order to cap the previous day's work; whereupon Mme. Storey held up her hand.

"Nothing doing," she declared firmly.

"Hey?" said Jake, with a falling face.

"I'm done!"

"What!" he cried. "Why, we've just started!"

"No," she said. "I've made a nice little stake out of these two jobs. I'm satisfied. As for publicity, I can scarcely better what I've got. Better quit while I'm on the crest of the wave. You may make out in your newspaper stories that I'm a superwoman, but as a matter of fact I'm just the common or garden variety like any other. And if I try to bite off more than I can chew I'll choke."

"Have you lost your nerve?" he asked with a sneer.

"Not my nerve," said my mistress coolly; "it's as steady as ever it was, and my wits are better. But my body is beginning to rebel. After all, I'm no longer young. A woman of fifty-five, even though she may have kept a passable figure, is not expected to run like a gazelle. When I got home yesterday I collapsed. I had to have a heart stimulant to bring me around."

"Well," said Jake smoothly, "we'll bear that in mind when we're planning our next stunt."

"No," affirmed Mme. Storey, "I would not take anything safe and easy, either. I wouldn't appear before the public at all unless I could better this show, and as I don't see my way clear to doing that, I think it's a good place to quit."

Jake lost his smooth air. His distress was very real.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" he said. "You don't have to decide anything to-night. This is just a sort of reaction, like. Just let things run along for awhile. You've earned a good rest. Then my boss may have an idea that will appeal to you. He has the most brilliant mind in America to-day—a soaring mind."

"Just so," rejoined Mme. Storey; "but if you keep on flying higher and higher, you're bound to crash in the end. Not but what I hate to give it up, too," she added

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pensively. "I love the game. I love to match my wits against those who have money!"

"What 'll I say to the boss?" asked Jake plaintively. "He's countin' on you. You ought to hear the way he talked about you over the phone to-day. 'Jake,' he says, 'this is the best material we ever had to work with!'"

"Nice of him to say so," said Mme. Storey.

Jake did not perceive the dryness of her tone.

"Oh, the boss is never one to hold back credit from anybody," he said.

For an hour longer he continued to argue with her. By the end of that time she had convinced him that she meant what she said.

He was greatly depressed. More than anything else he was alarmed by a suggestion she let fall, that she was just going to drop out of things and travel.

He finally exacted a promise from her that she would not disappear until he had a chance to consult with the boss. When we left he asked anxiously:

"Be here to-morrow night?"

"Oh, I expect so," said my mistress indifferently. "We can't stay shut up in our rooms all the time."

On the following night Jake turned up with an entirely new line of arguments, which had no doubt been furnished him over the telephone during the day. When all these proved to be of no avail he said with an offhand air:

"How would you like a job inside the organization?"

I started inwardly. So this was where my mistress's elaborate comedy had been tending! I had not perceived her drift before.

"What sort of job?" she asked indifferently.

"To run our advisory department."

"What's that?"

"You would investigate likely plants, and furnish the operators with full details. You would think up big spectacular stunts, plant all the details, and coach the operators."

"Yes," said Mme. Storey, "and have somebody else take all the credit!"

"Oh, I don't know," replied Jake. "We could keep the Duchess alive in the public mind, though you never appeared in person."

"What would there be in it for me?"

Jake made a magniloquent gesture. "Oh, there wouldn't be any difficulty about that. The boss is the soul of generosity."

"Sure. But just what would it run to?"

"Well, say fifty thousand a year."

"Liberal enough," said Mme. Storey indifferently; "but it don't appeal to me much. I hate to be tied up in an organization. I like to be on my own."

Jake set himself to work to persuade her. Little by little she allowed it to appear that she was coming around. Finally we heard that which we were silently praying for. Jake said:

"The heads of the organization never meet. It's better so. We have other ways of communicating. But you and the boss would have to have one talk to settle the details."

"Plenty of time for that," said Mme. Storey carelessly. "We'd better wait until the search for me lets up a little."

"No need for that," said Jake. "Your present disguise is plenty good enough."

"Well, that's up to the boss," she said, shrugging. "If he wants to see me I'm at his service."

XV.

THREE days later Mme. Storey and I started out to keep our rendezvous with the "boss." You can imagine how my heart was beating. I could scarcely believe that we were in sight of the end of our difficult and dangerous job.

I was tormented with anxiety. So much mystery had been made of this powerful boss that he seemed to me to be invested with almost superhuman attributes. I dreaded lest he might slip through our fingers after all.

We were on our way to the Madagascar Hotel, where we were to ask for Mr. Peter Endicott. All the arrangements for the visit had been made with the greatest care.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jake the Canvasser was not to accompany us. Jake had wished Mme. Storey to go alone, but she had declined to do so. Any offer that might be made to her must include me, she said; and Jake finally conceded the point.

From the moment when the meeting had first been proposed we had been shadowed, as we were quick to perceive; and thereafter we never came out of the characters of Kate Arkledon and Peggy Ray. Our ordinary haunts knew us not. By day we remained shut up in the little flat on West —— Street. There was a telephone in the flat, but we dared not use it; the danger was too great that the boys at the switchboard might have been tampered with.

We finally solved the problem of communicating with Inspector Rumsey by taking a leaf out of Jake's book. We wrote the inspector a letter, and posted it in the mail chute outside the door of our flat.

The inspector could not communicate with us, and before setting out, Mme. Storey had armed herself with a pair of handcuffs, intending to make the arrest herself if the police failed her.

The lobby of the Madagascar displayed its usual animated aspect. Since they cut off the front to make a row of shops on the street it is always overcrowded. I felt rather than saw that we were objects of interest to several of the prosperously dressed men who were sitting and standing about. These I supposed to be police, and my heart rose. Inspector Rumsey was not showing himself—his face is too well known—but I had no doubt that he was near.

It appeared that our journey was not to end at the Madagascar. As we made inquiry at the desk, a slender, gentlemanly young chap stepped up from behind us.

"Good morning, ladies," he said, smiling. "I was waiting for you."

"Oh, are you Mr. Endicott?" said Mme. Storey, not without surprise. She had hardly expected to be received by such a stripling.

"His secretary, at your service. I am to take you to him."

I confess I did not like this at all. Mme. Storey appeared quite unconcerned.

"Where is it?" she asked.

"Half an hour's drive. I have a car waiting."

He led the way out. I hoped that the police were behind us, but did not like to turn my head to see. We stood waiting under the glass canopy in front, and presently an inconspicuous sedan drove up. Our conductor, always smiling, opened the door for us, and we drove off. I silently prayed that the police might have a car handy also. In the press of traffic it was impossible to tell if we were being followed.

Our route lay over the Queensboro Bridge and out Queens Boulevard. The young man made agreeable small talk all the way. He had all the *savoir faire* of a diplomatic secretary.

On the bridge and beyond it seemed to me that there were more motorcycle policemen than usual about, and I took hope from that. Perhaps they were under Inspector Rumsey's orders.

We drove very fast. Once on the boulevard we were stopped and warned by a policeman. Later, after we had turned to the right in a busy crossroad, another passed us at great speed and came back a few minutes afterward.

We now turned to the left and lost ourselves in one of the amazing new subdivisions that have sprung up so thickly in that district. Picture to yourself rows of little new wooden houses, all alike, stretching on every side as far as you could see. All designed alike, painted alike, the same number of shingles on each roof, I could swear; built so close together there was but just room for a man to walk between; not a tree in sight, and scarcely a blade of grass.

Thousands upon thousands of the little boxes, all alike. To me it was like a nightmare. Consider the numbing effect of this sameness upon the people who lived there! Then another thought came to me: what an admirable hiding place!

We turned right and left; right and left again so many times I was dizzied. All this was unnecessary, of course; the little streets were all laid out at right angles, and we could have reached our destination with one turn.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were street signs in the usual haphazard New York fashion, but we turned the corners so quickly, and the signs were so hard to find, I could rarely read them. And when at last we came to a stop before one of the little houses, no different from thousands of others, I didn't know what the name of the street was. The number of the house was 154.

"Is this Mr. Endicott's home?" asked Mme. Storey.

"One of them," said our conductor, smiling.

The instant we were out of the car, it whisked out of sight around a corner. We were admitted by a neat, elderly maid servant who looked as if she had seen all and told nothing.

The inside of the house was as standardized as the outside; the furnishings looked as if they had been purchased *en bloc* from an installment shop. But it was comfortable enough.

The servant requested us to follow her upstairs to take off our things. She led us into the front bedroom above.

"As you have so much to discuss with Mr. Endicott," she said in her quiet, courteous voice, "and as it would be imprudent for you to leave, and come back again, he hopes that you will remain as his guests here, until everything is settled."

Mme. Storey bowed.

"Does that mean we are prisoners?" I asked when the woman had left us.

"Pooh!" said Mme. Storey. "They couldn't keep us in this match-box against our will. We could kick our way out."

The front door closed, and we saw the young man who had brought us, making his way quickly up the street. A moment later we heard a motorcycle. As silently as a shadow, Mme. Storey ran to the window, but did not succeed in attracting the rider's attention.

"He was clever to follow us so far into this maze," she said.

"But how can he pick out the house now?" I groaned.

"We'll hang out a sign," she said, fishing in her bag for a pencil. "A sheet of paper. Oh, for a sheet of paper!"

It was not forthcoming.

"Never mind," she said, "the upper part of the house is painted white."

We locked the door, and she stationed me beside it to listen for the return of the maid. She threw up one of the windows, and sitting upon the sill, leaned over and began to pencil her initials in big black letters on the white space between the two windows: R. S. In the absolute sameness of that street, it must have stuck out like a sore finger.

We had the window closed, and were standing decorously in the middle of the room, when the maid returned.

"If you are ready," she said.

"Please lead the way," said Mme. Storey.

On the floor below the maid opened the door into the rear room, and stood aside to let us enter. I followed my mistress with a fast beating heart.

It was a narrow room with a single window in the corner, looking out on a cement paved space between two kitchen extensions. It was furnished with a "dining suite" and two easy chairs, one on each side of the gas logs. A man stood with his back to us, looking out of the window.

At the sound of our entrance he turned around, and my heart gave a great jump. *I knew that face!* That clever face with the full, dark, beaming eye of the enthusiast; where had I seen it before?

My brain spun around like a teetotum, and then settled down soberly. I remembered. It was Ambrose G. Larned, the publicity genius; and the last time I had seen him was at Mme. Storey's own dinner table!

I stole a glance at my mistress. Under the grease paint her expression was very bland.

"So this is the Duchess!" said our host, coming forward with outstretched hand. "And her trusty lieutenant! Sit down ladies, we have much to talk over."

XVI

WELL, there we sat, the three of us, in front of the tawdry fireplace, Mme. Storey and I in the two easy chairs, and the unsuspecting Mr. Larned between us in a straightbacked chair. My mistress was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smoking one of the famous little cigars, and Mr. Larned waved a cigarette about while he talked.

Each recognizing a great spirit in the other, they mostly ignored me. I was quite content to look and listen.

"We strike in the spot of our own choosing," Mr. Larned said enthusiastically; "and with a high-powered automobile at hand, or as in your case a speedy motor boat, the danger of capture is almost nonexistent—that is, if the affair has been properly planned. And no policeman can tell in advance where the next blow will fall.

"Just look at our record during the last few weeks. First, the creation of the bobbed hair bandit with the numerous exploits to her credit; then the robbery of Mme. Storey in her office; then the double holdup of Fossberg's; and finally your magnificent raid on Beauvoir last week to cap the climax. What can the police do? What could Mme Storey do with all her boasted cleverness? Why, nothing.

"A vastly overrated woman, by the way," he went on, lighting a fresh cigarette. "I know her. There is nothing much to her. Publicity has made her. Which is a further illustration of my point. Publicity will do anything."

I heard the doorbell sound somewhere in the house. Mr. Larned's eyelids flickered, but he kept right on talking:

"Publicity is man's greatest discovery. He doesn't know what he's got yet. There are any number of professors and practitioners and promoters of publicity; but they haven't scratched the surface of their subject."

I noticed that nobody went to the door. The suspense became almost more than I could bear, sitting still.

"Rather a good scheme this of ours, don't you think?" said Mr. Larned. "One directing head, and a number of units working quite independently."

"And taking all the risk," put in Mme. Storey slyly.

"Surely," he said with the utmost coolness; "and quite right, too. It would not be fitting for the commanders to expose themselves on the firing line. The individual operators must fail sometimes, but the organization goes on—"

The front door went in with a crash. A second later Inspector Rumsey entered the room, with other men behind him. Larned swelled up like a pouter pigeon.

"How dare you?" he cried. "What do you mean by this outrage?"

"Inspector Rumsey of the police department," said our friend coolly. "You are under arrest." Then he recognized his prisoner. "Ah, Mr. Larned, so we meet again!"

Larned still essayed to bluff it out.

"You know me," he cried. "Everybody knows Ambrose G. Larned. How dare you break into my private dwelling?"

"It won't go, Larned," said the inspector smiling. "Thanks to the activities of this lady, we know all about you and your organization. Jake Golden is already under arrest."

"Who is this woman?" queried Larned.

"The Duchess," said Rumsey with relish; "alias Kate Arkledon; but in reality, Mme. Rosika Storey."

Larned collapsed like a pricked balloon. The sight was both tragic and absurd. He slunk to one side, and dropped into a chair.

Well, that ended one crime wave. If another one rolled up almost immediately afterward it was not our fault. Abell and a plainclothes man brought a chopfallen little pair of bandits back from Saranac next day. I would not have missed the scene when Mme. Storey returned Falseface's ring with a smile.

What an extraordinary psychological study Larned was. I believe he was a little mad. Mme. Storey and I visited him in jail. Even in his downfall he played the great man, and displayed no rancor toward her.

He still loved to air his theories on publicity. It was his theories which had led him into crime. He explained that having tasted all the possible successes of a regular business career, he craved a greater excitement; and finally yielded to the temptation of wielding this enormously powerful weapon in secret.

THE END

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Face Value

By JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE

Author of "Personality Plus," "What Price the World," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I

NEVIL CRAIG secures a position in the James Bree chain grocery store in Westcombe, under the management of Henry Spackman; and goes to live at the boarding house of Mrs. Evans. Craig becomes engaged to Natalie Bent, a cashier in the store. A few days afterward he discovers that Spackman is receiving an illegal commission from a man selling him fresh produce. When Craig threatens to expose the manager, the latter tells him that he has just found out that Natalie has stolen one hundred and twenty-five dollars. Spackman offers not to prosecute her if Nevil will repay the money out of his savings. Craig agrees that Natalie should resign. But when Spackman wants Craig to leave, too, Craig declares that he will stay until he has found out everything—and that if Spackman bothers him, he will cause an investigation of the manager's produce-buying accounts.

CHAPTER IX.

FOR HIS OWN.

NEVIL CRAIG left the manager alone in the store, glad to get away from the sight of him and the sound of his voice. He went out the back door and through the alley to Congress Street, but when he turned to the right, toward Maple Street, he halted.

Maple Street and Mrs. Evans's boarding house were too close to him, and he wished them a score of miles away. Natalie was at the boarding house, probably waiting and watching for him from the porch, and the ordeal of meeting her was becoming something unthinkable.

There was a barber shop two doors from the corner, and he went to the low stone step of the doorway and sat down, shrinking into the deep shadow cast by a large maple tree. He feared that thinking would be a difficult matter, once he reached the house and Natalie, and it had become

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 13.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tragically necessary for him to think a great deal.

He had been an orphan at ten, but the practical, hard-headed uncle was kind enough to him, and there had been few vexing problems for him to work out himself.

Now, however, he was confronted with a puzzle for philosophers and doctors of law, and the greatest fear that lurked in the back of his mind was that selfishness might sway him; that he might shirk his duty to the little slip of a girl whom he scarcely knew, but whom he had strangely, unaccountably made his own.

He had come from a section of the country where tradition still exercised a powerful influence on the people, and he found himself searching memory for precedents that might guide him. The Craigs, he had often heard, were stern men without sentiment, but it was said also that they were loyal to their own; they were not tender toward their women, but they shielded them from the world, in sickness and in health, in weakness or in strength.

Much that flashed through his mind seemed to bear out the statements of Spackman. Natalie had not been herself for days, and her melancholy mood of the previous night, at the table and before they went walking together, was something foreign to her buoyant, careless, elfin nature. The abandon with which she flung herself into his keeping was evidence enough of weakness and despair more childlike than feminine, and he was moved to a deep pity for her.

A church bell struck ten, and he started up guiltily, pulled himself together, and went slowly up Maple Street, shuffling like an old man.

Natalie came down the steps to meet him, and she was tremulous and tearful.

"Did anything happen?" she demanded. "Why did you leave me so long, Nevil? I've been listening for you two hours or more."

She was more hurt than resentful, and he took her hands in his and kissed her.

"Something happened," he said tensely, answering her first question. "I saw Spackman, and he—we had a long talk."

"What for?" she asked curiously.

He was watching her face in the faint light from the street lamp, and he saw nothing but the curiosity of the girl who had waited for her lover impatiently; but there was a quaver in her voice, and her hands seemed to tremble slightly as he held them.

"What did you talk about?" she demanded. "Can't you tell me? What makes you act like that, Nevil? Something must have happened! Did you have trouble with him? Don't look like that! I've got a right to know what's the matter, if there's any trouble, haven't I?"

Her anxiety and excitement were now only too evident, and his hopes—the hopes that he had loyally entertained—were wavering.

She sighed wearily, and the breath caught in her throat like a little sob. She drew her hands away from him, and sat down on the steps.

"I don't see why you don't tell me!" she complained fretfully.

"I shall tell you about it, of course," he replied miserably. "But you mustn't get excited, Natalie!"

"Excited?" she queried. "Why? You weren't talking about me, were you? Nevil, was it about me? Was it? If Henry Spackman told you anything on me, he lied! I'll go and tell 'im to his face that he's a liar!"

"I told him that," said Nevil quietly.

She was on her feet again, and there was a hysterical note in her voice. He warned her that the people in the house would hear if she raised her voice, but it was hard to quiet her; the more primitive instincts of self-defense were coming to the surface, and he thought regretfully that she lacked the poise that insures repression and discretion.

"If that old rat said anything about me, I've got a right to know!" she cried. "He's a crook and a liar. You didn't believe 'im, did you?"

He put his arm about her, and begged her to be calm.

"It's all right now," he whispered soothingly. "I made it all right, as far as he's concerned."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Did you knock 'im down?"

"No," he answered dejectedly, with most of his feeble confidence in her gone, "I promised to pay him the money."

"What money? Who said anything about money? What have I got to do with money?"

"It's about the—the sales slips, Natalie."

"What about 'em? I don't know anything about any sales slips! Can't you come right out and talk, Nevil?"

Now there seemed to be something hard and defiant in her manner.

"Please be quiet, and listen to me without getting excited," he said sternly. "Spackman says that a lot of sales slips and stubs have been changed—erased and altered, and all that. He says that about a hundred and twenty-five dollars has been taken out of the office, and he—well, he thinks you did it."

She broke away from him with a cry, and he sprang forward, and caught her again, and clapped his hand over her mouth.

"You've got to be quiet!" he said firmly, trying to be kind. "Do you want all the people in the house out here?"

"He lies!" she gasped furiously. "Go and get 'im! Bring 'im here now, and I'll tell 'im he's a liar."

"I don't want you to have any trouble, Natalie," he said, holding her and checking each threatened outburst. "It wouldn't do—you can see that. Spackman put it up to me. He said he was willing to keep it quiet, or if it couldn't be handled that way he would report it to the police, and let them take care of the case."

"Why didn't he?" she demanded fiercely. "I should worry!"

"You don't know what it would mean," he said. "You're not strong enough to—to have a lot of trouble with the police. I agreed to hand him the money to-morrow, and—nothing more will happen. Of course, you won't go back to the store again."

"I don't want to go back!" she raged. "I'd hit 'im on the face if I saw 'im again. But you're not going to pay any money! I don't know anything about any sales slips; I never took any of his rotten money. And you think I did! You do, don't you? You think I'm a thief!"

"I haven't even asked you," he said gently. "I've been waiting for you to tell me. We haven't known each other so very long, Natalie, and—well, lots of queer things happen in this world. People that mean to be good, and try to do the right thing most of the time—they get tempted and do foolish things."

"You got tempted—and did a foolish thing, didn't you?" she demanded coldly, sinking into a tragical calm. "No one with any sense would fall for a flapper like me on such short acquaintance, would they? You got engaged to me without knowing whether I was a thief, or what I was.

"But it's easy enough to get out, Mr. Craig. Just walk right out! I'm not the kind to go starting any breach-of-promise stuff—if that's what worries you. If you had much sense, you'd tell Spackman to call the cops and have me pinched. It's nothing in your young life!

"Lucky for you that all this happened before we got married! Then you would 'a' been up against it, wouldn't you? But I can't see why you want to give up any good money on my account."

She was brazenly defiant, but suddenly she broke and collapsed. He thought she was fainting, and he lifted her up and placed her in one of the chairs on the porch. She was shaking from head to foot, and she clutched one of his hands in both of hers and gripped it till he winced.

"It's all a lie, Nevil!" she sobbed. "I never took any of their old money. I don't know anything about their sales slips—'cept I've seen about a million too many of the rotten things. Nevil, I never took a penny that didn't belong to me in my whole life! Heaven knows I'm telling you the truth!"

"Why didn't you say so right off, Natalie?" he inquired simply. "That's all there is to it, isn't it?"

She sat up, and stared at him curiously in the half darkness.

"Do you believe me?" she demanded incredulously.

"Yes, I believe you, Natalie."

"Why?"

He was silent for a moment, but he gathered her trembling hands into his again, and held them tenderly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Seems to me," he whispered, "that if there's one person on earth that a man ought to believe, it's the one that's—that's nearest to him. If a man doesn't believe his wife, who can he believe?"

"His wife?" she gasped.

"It's all the same, isn't it? We're engaged, and when we both made up our minds that we wanted to be, that settled everything, didn't it? I never thought that getting engaged was like taking some one on trial. It's a promise, and it ought to be the hardest one to break—for decent people that mean what they say."

"What if I'd said I did take the money?"

"I'd 'a' been sorry," he admitted boyishly. "But it couldn't make any difference—with us. If we were married, and some one said that I had taken some money or done something wrong, do you think you'd quit me?"

"No," she said stoutly, "I'm not that kind either."

"I do believe you, Natalie," he assured her again. "But we can't go and tell Spackman to do anything he likes. If he got the police into it, you couldn't stand the awful row; it would just about kill you, and people would never stop talking about it. They'd point you out to folks on the street, and it wouldn't make any difference if it was proved that you never had anything to do with the case.

"That's why I'm going to give Spackman the money, but after that I'm going to find out who did take it. I'm going to stay right on in that store until I clean up everything, and I don't think Henry Spackman himself can get me out."

"Will you kiss me, Nevil?" she asked, and began to cry softly.

A wave of tenderness and renewed confidence swept over him, and he gathered her up out of the chair, and clasped her close to him.

"Of course, I can't go to that place again," she said presently, lifting her head from his shoulder, and looking at him adoringly. "Tell me what I must do, Nevil. What'll I say to the people here? I suppose I ought to go away. I've got an aunt in Vickerstown, and I could get there in about three hours."

"I don't know," he answered doubtfully. "I'd miss you a lot, Natalie, but—we ought to think about what may happen. I think this thing will be kept quiet, but you never can tell. And you must try not to be nervous. All the folks will want to know in the morning why you're not going to the store. You'll have to have an excuse all ready, or they'll pester you till you're all wrought up again."

"That's why I ought to go away," she said fearfully.

He was silent for awhile, thinking, questioning himself.

All at once he caught her close to him again, and kissed her.

"I'll tell you what to say to them!" he cried. "Tell them that you have left the store—because it's your wedding day. Tell 'em we're getting married in the afternoon, and tell Eva Jones she can come along if she wants to be bridesmaid."

"Nevil!" she gasped. "You don't mean that! You'd never do that! Would you, Nevil? Do you really want me?"

"We shouldn't be engaged if I didn't," he said convincingly. "We're engaged, and if we going to get married, why not tomorrow? You need me—and I need you."

A wonderful radiance broke over her troubled face.

"I'll never make you sorry for it, Nevil!" she vowed, and then the tears came in torrents. "I'll tell 'em that!" she sobbed. "I guess that will hold 'em for a while!"

CHAPTER X.

THE GESTURE MAGNIFICENT.

NEXT morning Nevil left the store for ten minutes, and went to the savings bank where his tiny fortune was cared for. On his return he asked Spackman to step into the back room with him, and handed him a hundred and twenty-five dollars in currency.

"I suppose you want some kind of a receipt," said the manager.

"No, I don't," Nevil answered. "I don't want anything written about that, and I want you to forget it, as far as Miss Bent is concerned."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sort of a gentleman's agreement, eh?"

"No, nothing of the kind. But it's a bargain. You told me what you wanted, and what you were willing to do. and I've done my part."

"I must say that I appreciate your confidence in me, Craig," said the manager, the chronic smirk stealing over his face.

"I haven't any confidence in you!" exclaimed Nevil savagely. "But I'll tell you, Spackman, if you say anything—to any one—about that girl, I'll break you in two! This isn't just a lot of talk; I think I'd kill you, Spackman."

The man glanced about him nervously.

"I could have you locked up for saying that," he said.

"Too bad you haven't got witnesses! But you don't need them; I'd admit I said it, if I was accused. They can't lock anyone up for long, just for a threat; they put you under bonds, usually. But you'd have to be pretty far off when I got loose—Africa, or some place like that."

"What's the use of talking foolishness?" snapped the manager. "I happen to be a man of my word. I've been thinking things over, Craig, and I don't see any way for you to stay here, after what's been said."

"I don't see any way for you to get me out," retorted the young man. I'm going to stay—quite awhile, perhaps. It's blackmail; I know that well enough, but I'm going right on with it. I'm going to work here same as usual, and if there's any more trouble I'm going to make a report to the main office of the James Bree stores. I'll tell 'em to call that farmer, and squeeze the whole story out of him.

"Right now I'm compounding a felony, Spackman, and it's the first time I ever did anything dishonest or criminal in my life. But I want to tell you right here that your game can't go on; I wouldn't keep quiet and let the manager of this store go right on cheating the owner."

"We're going to have a difficult time, aren't we?" said Spackman dryly.

"Yes, we are, if you try to make any more money like that. I'm swallowing my conscience and keeping quiet, just for the sake of—of a helpless young girl that you would disgrace. But you needn't think that I've had to become a party to your game. No more rake-off on produce, Spackman; and I want to see the prices come down to the right level, and stay that way."

"If I don't agree to your absurd conditions, there'll be a pretty mess, won't there? You'll accuse me of graft, and have to prove it, and I'll have your sweetheart arrested for theft."

"It may have to come to that," Nevil admitted. "But Miss Bent would stand a better chance of acquittal than you would. And she won't be alone, then; she'll be my wife."

"Really!" exclaimed the man. "Congratulations, Craig! Your confidence in the young lady is beautiful. I'm sure no man is likely to marry a thief with his eyes open. When does the happy event take place?"

"This afternoon."

"I see," mused the manager, smiling broadly. "That's what they call a magnificent gesture, isn't it? You are offering proof of your absolute confidence in the lady. Well, I hope she'll prove appreciative. I suppose you will want the afternoon off then?"

"I'm taking the afternoon off," said Nevil.

"See here!" snapped Spackman, "you can't start any bullying here, you know. You needn't think I'm going to be made ridiculous in my own store."

"There won't be any bullying—not before it's time for it. I'm going on working just the same as usual, I tell you, but I think I'll manage to find out who the piker was that sneaked money out of the cash drawer, and fixed the slips. That's what I'm staying here for, you know. I'm going to get married this afternoon, and that's a pretty important matter; so I'm not begging permission from you."

"How old are you, Craig?" asked Spackman, with something like friendly curiosity.

"I'm a little over twenty-two now."

"Mm—well, you have quite a little time to learn things, and you'll get some pretty tough lessons, young man. If you had a little old-fashioned horse sense along with your energy and general pep, you might amount to something. You're the kind that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

have to learn their own lessons, though, and you have my sympathy."

"Much obliged," said Nevil curtly, and walked out into the store.

He was late at the boarding house for luncheon, and most of the boarders were in the dining room. Natalie was waiting for him in Mrs. Evan's parlor, and he went to her with a rather shy smile, and quickly slipped a small diamond ring on her finger.

"It's the best I could do, Natalie," he said apologetically. "We have to save what money we've got. It only cost eighty dollars. I've got the other ring in my pocket, and I've got the license, and I've made a date with the Reverend Mr. Yates at the parsonage for four o'clock."

She hugged him tightly, and the ready tears came again.

"Don't cry—on your wedding day," he protested gently. "We'd better try to act as natural as possible, and we'll be late for lunch if we don't go in pretty soon."

"Do we have to go in there?" she asked timidly. "I didn't go down to breakfast. I've told Eva just about everything, and she told 'em I had a headache, and she brought me up some coffee and eggs and things."

"I know," he said; "I was glad you didn't come down. I could tell from Eva's actions that you'd told her about it. But we'd better go in and face 'em, dearest; we're not afraid of anybody."

Eva Jones was the first one to discover the ring, as Natalie took her place at the table, and she sprang up impulsively and ran around to give her a hug and a kiss.

"You darling! I'm so glad!" she said.

Mrs. Waters stared at the two girls in cold surprise; then her keen eyes fell upon the little diamond, and she raised her eyebrows, and favored Miss Kinnock with a confidential little grimace expressing contempt.

Young Arnold Waters took the cue from his mother, and sniffed derisively.

It was to be remarked that the company was strangely silent, and Nevil grew instantly ill at ease. Not even the garrulous Vincent Dane had a word to offer, and the usually friendly Clifford Hartree looked disturbed. Mrs. Evans would have risen to the occasion, no doubt, but she was in the kitchen.

Nevil decided to test the quality of the atmosphere. If there were storms brewing, it would be as well to know it.

"This is our wedding day, Clif," he said to Hartree, with forced gayety. "Miss Bent is going out this afternoon, and Mrs. Craig's coming in."

"That's great, Nevil!" exclaimed Hartree, trying to appear delighted. "I'm sure I congratulate you—both of you."

Silence again. Every one was engaged busily with eating.

"Are you expecting to continue living here, Mr. Craig?" inquired Mrs. Waters, and her voice cut the air with its sharpness.

"For awhile, I guess," answered Nevil, looking surprised. "We haven't made many plans yet."

"It would make some difference with my plans," said the lady, and her eyes flashed fire. "I have always been seeking a refined home for myself and my son—even if we are boarding only temporarily—and we shall have to look for other quarters if you and—and this girl are remaining here."

Natalie's face went white, then the blood rushed back in a vivid flush. She started to speak, but Nevil caught her eye and shook his head.

"I can't talk with a woman like you, Mrs. Waters," he said angrily. "You'd better see Mrs. Evans if you want to make a complaint."

"Really! The insolence of the man!" cried Mrs. Waters, appealing to Miss Kinnock. "I wouldn't put on any such independent air, if I were you, Mr. Craig. The boarders here know quite well why this girl is not working to-day.

"Persons with an unsavory secret to keep should be more discreet than to talk about it on the front porch. My son was not desirous of hearing such disgraceful scandal, but he chanced to be just inside the parlor window, and he heard—oh, quite enough, I assure you.

"And now," she continued fiercely, giving him no chance to reply, "the ladies and gentlemen here understand a little

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more clearly what happened last June, when we attributed certain losses of personal property to a visit from sneak thieves."

"That 'll do!" cried Nevil sharply, still holding Natalie in check with a warning glance. "If you force this to become a public matter, Mrs. Waters, I'll see that you have to answer for every word you've said. I wouldn't stoop to explain to an old buzzard like you one single thing that your half-witted son overheard last night, and I don't want to hear any more about it."

"Buzzard!" screamed the widow. "Do you hear that! I'll send for the police!"

"Aw, give 'im the air, Mrs. Waters!" cried Vincent Dane. "He'll get out o' here now fast enough. We've all got enough on the both of 'em to make it too hot for 'em here. I'm going to try to find out what pawnshop has got my ukelele and my nice-fitted suit case, and some other things that walked out of my room last spring."

Nevil sprang to his feet so suddenly that his chair was overturned, and Miss Kinnock uttered a high-pitched but perfectly well-bred cry of alarm.

Mrs. Evans rushed into the room, her kindly face pale with fear.

"Oh, Mr. Craig, don't have any trouble," she implored him. "What's all the trouble anyhow?"

"The hounds are on the trail, Mrs. Evans," said Eva Jones, who was standing back of Natalie's chair. "Mrs. Waters thinks she's got something on somebody, so she's enjoying herself. You can do as you please, of course, Mrs. Evans, but if that old hen stays here, and Natalie goes, you'll be rid of me too."

"Of course you can do as you please, Mrs. Evans," raged the widow, "but I don't take you for the sort of woman that would care to run a den of thieves. We've found out all about that sneak-thief myth; I knew well enough there were no sneak thieves—from outside. I've been suspicious of that girl ever since she came here; I could see at once what sort of a character she was."

"I wouldn't talk like that, Mrs. Waters," protested Mrs. Evans sorrowfully. "I guess I know Natalie better than you do. I'm not worried about her character."

"Don't make me laugh, Mrs. Evans," said Vincent Dane. "You're too innocent to be running a boarding house. That girl hasn't got character enough to speak about. I've been round with her enough to know, haven't I? This Craig feller did me a big favor when he took her off my hands."

Nevil leaped the length of the table and struck out madly, and the larger man, rising to meet him, went backward with his chair and crashed against the wall.

"Help! Help! Police!" shrieked Mrs. Waters.

"You shut up!" cried Mrs. Evans, as she suddenly seized the widow by the shoulders and shook her violently.

"Want any more?" demanded Nevil, as Dane got slowly to his feet, nursing a closing eye.

"Not with ladies present," muttered Dane gallantly; "but you look out for yourself outside."

Eva gathered the half swooning Natalie up in her arms and helped her out of the room and upstairs.

Miss Kinnock showed herself a philosophical bystander, a calm and cool observer of the human comedy.

"To think," she said, with a dry little laugh, "that this house was recommended to me because it was so quiet and refined—so select! I believe even that term was used."

"You're at liberty to make a change, miss!" snapped Mrs. Evans. "I didn't think you were so particular, judging by your getting so thick with Mrs. Waters. She's the only disreputable woman I've ever had in my house, and she gets out tonight, along with her brat."

Eva Jones came downstairs to get some cracked ice for the distracted Natalie's throbbing head, and Nevil spoke to her in the hall.

"Tell her to brace up and not worry about anything," he said. "I'll go down to the store for awhile, but I'll be back by three o'clock. We're going over to the minister's at four."

"I know," said Eva. "I'm going with you. You couldn't keep me away from my

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

best friend's wedding, Nevil. Even Henry Spackman couldn't keep me away, and I told him so."

CHAPTER XI.

'TWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP.

EVA JONES was ten minutes over her noon hour when she returned to the store after ministering to the needs of Natalie, but Spackman sensed quickly that something unusual had happened at the boarding house, and he took one look at her brooding eyes and omitted the usual reprimand.

Then at three o'clock she informed him that she had to dress for the wedding that she had already spoken of, and he contented himself with nothing more than an ironical smirk.

She left the store with Nevil, and they hurried to Maple Street.

"You won't take her back to the house to-day, I hope," said Eva anxiously. "I don't see how she could stand it again so soon—and after her wedding."

"No," he answered. "I thought of that right away. We can't afford a regular honeymoon, but we'll take a taxi out to that little hotel on the north side of Lake Marverne. I phoned to them this afternoon for a room. You'll come out with us for dinner. We'll stay there about a week, I guess, if Natalie likes the place, and I can travel back and forth on the trolley. I wouldn't ask Spackman for any more time off right now."

"She'll like it well enough, poor kid!" said Eva. "Natalie's never had very much to enjoy, and—gee, it's a rotten shame that she had to have her wedding day all messed up like that!"

The house was very quiet when they arrived. There was no one on the porch, and the parlor and hall were deserted.

"I'll tell her the bridegroom's here, Nevil," said Eva, affecting an appropriate gayety, and ran up the stairs.

Nevil laughed. It seemed that there had been too full a measure of pain and misery in that day, but they must forget all of that and prepare to celebrate.

Footsteps came slowly down the stairs, dragging rather too much for happiness, and he stepped out of the parlor. It was Eva, and she looked so pale that he cried out in alarm.

"Here's a note for you," she said hoarsely. "I got one, too."

With shaking hands he tore open the envelope and snatched out a sheet of paper that had been badly crumpled before it was folded for the cover. The wrinkles obscured some of the pen strokes, but he made out the words only too readily.

DEAREST NEVIL:

They all lied, but there were too many lies for me to stand. I have thought it all over, and I don't think that I am much good. You came too late, Nevil, to make me what I ought to be, for you. I am afraid that it is pity more than love that has made you so good to me.

Please forgive me for keeping the ring. It is all I have to remember you by. You will not be able to find me, even if you try to, so please just forget all about me. I love you, Nevil. NATALIE.

He passed the letter to Eva silently, and sat down with his hands clasped about his whirling head.

"The poor little kid!" moaned Eva, and began to sob brokenly as she read the letter.

"You see," said Nevil, "she wasn't sure what she ought to do. She must have crumpled up that letter after she wrote it, to throw it away. Then she thought it all over again, and smoothed it out, and sealed it."

"The one to me just said good-by," said Eva, "and that Mrs. Evans was out, and she must hurry to get away before any of us came back. Have you any idea where she could go? She didn't have much money."

"She has an aunt in Vickerstown, and she has spoken of going there. But you see, she says I couldn't find her if I tried. Of course, I'll go there just the same, but I don't even know the aunt's name."

"You'll find her, Nevil!" predicted the girl.

"Of course, I will, if I live!" he declared, and choked suddenly.

They walked aimlessly along the hall,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and young Arnold Waters came down the stairs.

"Say," he said eagerly, "that Bent girl beat it in a taxi with her trunk and everything, right after Ma Evans went out. Prob'ly owed about a month's board, too. She was scared all right; she was blubbering like a fool when she got into the taxi."

Nevil pounced on the young man, caught him by the collar, and gave him a stunning blow across the face with his open hand. Then he lifted him, and flung him almost halfway up the stairs.

The youth bawled shrilly for help, and his mother appeared as if by magic at the top of the staircase.

"That's assault and battery!" she cried. "I'll have you prosecuted, you ruffian!"

Then, having delivered her threat, she was evidently tempted to gloat a little.

"If you're looking for that woman," she said, "she got away about half an hour ago. It was getting too hot for her, I guess. Well, good riddance to bad rubbish!"

"Mr. Craig can't hit a woman!" cried Eva fiercely. "But I can!"

She leaped up the stairs, and the widow screamed shrilly, fled into her room, and locked the door.

"I'd like to laugh," said Eva, turning to look down at Nevil from the head of the stairs, "but I can't—not for a long while."

She began to sob again, and went to her room.

Nevil managed to telephone to the clergyman that there would be no wedding, not for a time, at any rate, and then he walked to the railway station.

"I want to find out if a young lady bought a ticket here for the two fifty train," he said to the man at the ticket window. "She's light-complexioned, and she probably wore a blue dress. She—er—she's a very pretty girl."

"Is it the girl that's at the cashier's desk in the Bree store?" the man inquired.

"Yes, yes, she's the one!" cried Nevil, vastly relieved.

"She took that train, but she bought a ticket just to the junction; said she wasn't sure which way she'd go from there. She seemed kind o' confused; said she was starting on her vacation, and hadn't made up her mind where to go. Oh, she asked about trains to Vickerstown, and then she said she guessed she wouldn't go there anyway. You're trying to locate her, I reckon."

Nevil tried to look less anxious and depressed.

"Oh, her roommate, Miss Jones, wants to find her," he said lightly. "She left sooner than she expected, I guess."

He thanked the man for the information, then waited in the station for the four o'clock train to the junction. There was a small ticket office there, and he repeated his questions to the station agent, but with little better success.

The agent remembered the girl because she had asked about trains in several directions. Finally she had taken a ticket for Albany, saying that she would make up her mind whether to go North, West, or South, when she got there.

Nevil groaned and walked away, but he turned back and asked for the number of the Albany train. Then he sent a telegram to be delivered to her at a way station:

> If my happiness is anything to you come back at once. You do not know how you have hurt me. At least, let me know where you are going, for I shall hunt for you till I find you. NEVIL.

As he read it over it looked rather boyish and futile, and he flushed painfully when he was obliged to submit it to the agent. But the latter was a man of experience, and as he counted the words and took the money for the message, he showed no change of countenance.

Nevil got back to town just before six o'clock, and he hastened to the store. Spackman was in the office, and he looked up with a knowing grin as the young man entered.

"I'll ask you as a favor not to say anything that will make me sore to-night," said Nevil earnestly. "There wasn't any wedding, as you probably know, and Miss Bent has left town. She's gone because those wild animals at the boarding house made life here unbearable for her."

"What do you want me to do, Craig?" asked the manager in surprise. "I'm flattered by your confidence, but I haven't

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

very much influence at your boarding house, have I?"

"No, of course not, but I've come to you to ask how much influence you have in another quarter. You carry more advertising in the two newspapers here than any other provision merchant in town, don't you? Well, I want to show you that it wouldn't do you any good, and it might do you a lot of harm, if the newspapers came out with the whole story about Miss Bent.

"I know six persons, at least, in our boarding house who will do all they possibly can to make a public scandal of what has happened to-day.

"They all know now that Miss Bent was accused of—well, anyway, that she left this store under some sort of suspicious circumstances, and if they can set a couple of those bloodhound reporters on the trail, there'll be stories in the papers that will bring all the auditors and inspectors of the James Bree system flocking here to find out how you're running the business."

Spackman twisted his face into a speculative scowl.

"What you say has rather more sense in it than you generally show in your reasoning, Craig," he remarked. "On the whole, I'm glad that you brought this to my attention. I'll drop in to see my friends on the papers, on my way home."

"It's surely for your own interest to do that," Nevil urged, "and you can understand that I'm acting for Natalie Bent's sake."

"I understand perfectly," drawled the manager sarcastically. "I'm not doing anything precisely for your sake, Craig, and you're not losing any sleep about my welfare, but the hushing-up of the newspapers will work out to the best interests of both of us. I'll see about it right away."

Nevil shunned the boarding house, and began to doubt that he could go on living there. He took coffee and a sandwich at a lunch room, then went to the telegraph office, and asked if a message had come for him. There was none, and he walked disconsolately about town all the evening, returning to the telegraph office at intervals.

His fourth visit, at ten o'clock, was not in vain. A telegram had come from Albany:

> Your happiness is everything to me, and that is why I am not coming back. I shall always love you. NATALIE.

He went out and walked until after midnight, and when a furtive visit to Maple Street showed him the windows of the boarding house all dark, he let himself in quietly, and went up to his room.

CHAPTER XII.

POOH-BAH.

EVA JONES was in the larger office at the rear of the store now, and a new girl took the cash at the desk near the door. Save for the objective that he had set for himself, Nevil would have fled the place; there were heart-rending reminders of Natalie everywhere he turned.

He was still at the boarding house, though he promised himself daily that he would leave, and as soon as he entered the store he glanced at the desk where he had seen her so often, and sighed.

Sometimes he grew introspective, and crudely philosophical. It irked him to recall that he had questioned his love for Natalie at first, and now it appeared almost that he was punished for his doubting, for the test of his love had well-nigh broken him, and left him miserably alone and forlorn.

On the other hand, he sometimes found himself wondering if the rather dramatic turn of events had worked upon his emotions. Did absence indeed make the heart grow fonder?

It was conceivable, according to examples all around him, that he and Natalie might have found married life in comparative poverty a rather dull and trying affair; but Natalie wandering far off, beyond his reach or ken, was still the one joy that he craved of life. Her departure had been picturesque, to say the least; there were elements of the heroic and the tragic in it, and the piercing thrill still lingered in his heart.

No carping critic at the store could say

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that he was anything but industrious and efficient. He worked strenuously for the greater glory of the somewhat mythical James Bree, and Henry Spackman occasionally complimented him, when he was in good humor.

With painstaking secrecy he was carrying out, and building up a private system of investigation for himself. There were few transactions in purchasing or selling that escaped his elert eye, and Eva Jones was secretly his confidential aid and lieutenant.

Unbeknown even to the clerks that worked side by side with him, his book of sales slips contained always an extra sheet of carbon, and extra duplicate sheets. At night, when he turned in his book of stubs at the desk, a roll of carbon copies of all the slips that he had made out that day, was in his pocket, and it was added later to his collection of such records in a steel lock-box at home.

At least once a week Eva Jones handed him a narrow strip of paper with a transcript of sales recorded in his own book, and the corresponding serial numbers of those sales. Then he sat in his room at night, and compared the figures.

So far there had been nothing but disappointment in the results, though they were admirable from the standpoint of the efficient accountant; but it was hardly time to expect the unknown trickster to resume his operations.

Great detectives were said to be endowed with infinite patience, proof against boredom and discouragement, and Nevil had dedicated himself to an unremitting vigil over those sales slips.

He had remained at the boarding house to avoid hurting the devoted Mrs. Evans, and to show her that he was grateful for the extirpation of the vermin, the widow Waters and her son, and Mr. Vincent Dane. They did not appear in the dining room after that memorable luncheon, and Nevil heard that he missed a thrilling scene in their enforced departure that evening.

Vincent Dane was sometimes the subject of troubled fancies, for he was an unprincipled, treacherous man to have for a foe; but they did not meet in the days immediately following the encounter in the dining room, and Nevil conjectured that he was out of town again, peddling his vacuum cleaners.

Then, one morning, Nevil went into the store at seven o'clock, and there was Dane towering above the grocery counter in the official regalia of white jacket and apron.

Quite evidently it was the deliberate work of Henry Spackman. No extra man was needed in the grocery department, or elsewhere in the store; but it was like Spackman to put Nevil's enemy beside him. If Nevil did not resign through sheer distaste for such an associate, there would more than likely be trouble which would effect the same result.

Dane grinned insolently when Nevil stepped behind the counter and stood within a yard of him; but the younger man gave no sign of recognition, and affected to ignore his presence.

"You needn't be afraid, kid," said the man in a low tone. "I'm not going to hurt you here. I gave the boss my word that I wouldn't make any trouble inside the shop—but nothing was said about any other place."

"You'll have no trouble finding me at the noon hour, or after six," Nevil retorted quietly.

"Well, if it ain't my old college chum, Vincent!" cried Morris Tandy, crossing the store from the meat counter. "We haven't had any fun at the house since you left us, old hoss! And I see you and the kid have made up and shook hands on it, eh?"

"Yeh! Just like the dog and cat making up," said Dane with a leering glance at Nevil.

The latter turned and began to talk to Clifford Hartree, and Tandy grinned and winked significantly at Dane.

"Heard the news?" Hartree asked Nevil. "Billy Graaf is coming. The boss got a telegram this morning."

"He's the general sales manager, isn't he?" said Nevil. "I've heard of him, but that's all I know."

"He's the big noise of the whole chain of stores," said Hartree. "He sits in a carved mahogany chair in New York most of the time, just pushing buttons and hav-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing the flunkys bring in his cigars and cigarettes. About once a year he swings round the circle, if he feels strong enough; and when he steps into a store the sales go right up, like the mercury in a thermometer if you set it on the stove.

"If a store's books show that sales have been falling off he lets out a roar, kicks the manager in the face, makes a few passes with some magic words, and the customers come tumbling in.

"William Henry Graaf his name is, but he's always written up in the self-help magazines as 'Little Billy Graaf, six feet two, weight two-fifty, the Mussolini of the grocery trade!' Twenty thousand a year is his salary, they say; and when he wants to talk with James Bree he pushes a button and old J. B. X. tumbles out of bed and beats it down town to Billy's office."

"He generally fires one or two clerks," remarked the wry-faced Roy Lewis, "just to show the manager who's boss. One time here he saw a button off the jacket of one o' the clerks, and he yelled at him to go to the office and get his time.

"Said that a button missing was bad business, rotten discipline, and had a terrible effect on customers. He had ol' Henry Spackman standing on one leg, sweating vinegar out of all his pores."

That afternoon a taxi dashed up to the store and the general sales manager alighted and made an entrance like the star comedian in a musical comedy.

There was something like a private secretary with him, a timid little man carrying a brief case almost as large as himself, and as they passed through the doors the Only Billy Graaf tossed his gloves and a walking stick to him with a splendid gesture, and then extended a large bejeweled hand in gracious cordiality to the bowing and scraping Henry Spackman.

Customers fell back in awe, and the clerks snapped to attention behind the counters.

"Hello, boys!" cried the regal visitor jovially, and included all the minions in another splendid gesture. "Now let's all look alive again; I appreciate the pleasure you manifest at seeing me again, but remember I'm only just another one of the clerks—one of James Bree's great big family!

"And what does this little lady want?" he inquired, stooping to shake hands with a small, scared girl who was frozen to a spot within the radius of his waving arms.

"Uh—uh 'east cake," she gasped, trembling between fright and ecstasy, and almost ready to believe in Santa Claus again.

"A yeast cake!" roared Billy Graaf. "Somebody fetch me a yeast cake for the little lady."

Max Fripp, the attendant at the fruit and vegetable stand, darted forward, slid the length of the aisle and snatched the required article from the refrigerator with incredible speed and deftness. He slid back again, and presented the shining foil-wrapped tablet to the general sales manager.

"Good lad!" applauded Billy. "You'll probably have my job some day, young man. And here's the little lady's yeast cake. Ah, yes, the pennies, that's right! Now you take back one of the pennies, my dear, and tell your ma that Billy Graaf gave it to you.

"If she asks you who Billy Graaf is, tell her that he's just a plain man, and one of the humblest employees of James Bree, who has over three hundred stores.

"The sale of a yeast cake, gentlemen," he declaimed, addressing the staff, "is a very important matter in the day's work. Don't forget that a yeast cake is just as important an item as a barrel of flour. No commodity is small or insignificant in the eyes of an efficient salesman.

"That young man over there is smiling," he charged, fixing a terrible eye upon Vincent Dane. "Don't think for a minute that I am trying to entertain you, gentlemen. I am solemnly preaching the gospel of efficient salesmanship to what I fondly hoped was a devout congregation."

"Excuse me, Mr. Graaf!" pleaded the startled Dane. "I didn't know I was smiling; that's the honest truth. I was just tickled to death that I happened to be at work here when you came; I'm a new man to-day. I've read an awful lot about you, Mr. Graaf, and I've always thought what an inspiration it would be just to hear you talk once."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You flatter me!" said Graaf deprecatingly. "But it's all right, sir. If you regard salesmanship as an art, a science—if you read serious literature about sales psychology then you and I are brothers."

Other customers shrank close to the counters and cleared a way for the great man's triumphal progress to the manager's office. Then a sort of Sabbath calm settled on the store as the door closed behind him.

"Let us pray!" muttered Morris Tandy, and a woman customer let out a hysterical giggle.

"Shut up, Morris!" hissed Roy Lewis across the store. "Get some sense in your bean! That guy has got eyes in the back of his head, and amplifiers in his ears. I've seen 'im when he was mad. He'd slice your block right off with one of your own cleavers."

At six o'clock Max Fripp closed and locked the doors, standing by to let out the last straggling customers. The day was over, but no clerk made a move to quit his post, and there was none of the customary sweeping or furbishing of fixtures.

Then Billy Graaf emerged from the glass inclosure, attended right and left by Henry Spackman and the small brief case bearer respectively.

The mogul halted in the middle of the store and once more addressed the staff.

"I find conditions generally satisfactory," he said. "But your store rates about Class C, gentlemen. You all have a right to know that; you are all members of the family. A little more pep, brothers! We must push this store right along into Class A. Mr. Spackman is the captain of the team, but every single one of you men is a manager of this store. Get that, men!

"It is always my pleasure to invite suggestions and recommendations from your managers. Equality and coöperation are favorite words in the lexicon of Mr. James Bree.

"What would you do, you manager over there?" he demanded, paralyzing Roy Lewis with a leveled finger and arm. "Tell us what you would do to steer this good ship right into the harbor of Class A."

Roy cleared his throat, and jerked the wrinkles out of his jacket.

"I—I'd have every man in the store study the rule book every day," he said piously, "and—er—and then I'd have weekly examinations on the rule book for all the help. I read your article in the *Salesman's Own Magazine*, Mr. Graaf—that one entitled 'Pep and Pepper,' and I'd have copies of that article distributed to all the employees. I feel that I've been a better salesman ever since I read it."

Mr. Graaf was not unaccustomd to speeches of the sort, and he smiled blandly, but looked bored.

"Very good, sir, but you overestimate the importance of my article," he said. "I amuse myself now and then by dashing off trifling little things like that.

"Have you anything to say, young man?" he asked, staring at the sober-faced Nevil Craig.

"If you really want me to take your time," said Nevil gravely, "I might suggest that a real up-to-date store should have the goods where customers can get at them. People don't often buy what they can't see, unless they come in to ask for it. High shelves don't sell anything.

"All the package goods ought to be out on open counters, where people can examine them. A good label on a package may work up an appetite for some one, and there's an extra sale. Seems to me that nothing but bakery goods, and meat, and perishable articles should be out of sight, or under glass.

"A money-making store is the one that sells a lot of things that people have no idea of buying when they go in."

"This young man speaks by the mouthful, Spackman!" exclaimed Graaf. "Of course I'm familiar with his theory, but I can see that he has been working it out in detail. Did you take down what he said, Yatter?"

"Yes, Mr. Graaf," answered the brief case bearer, who was scribbling shorthand characters on a small pad.

"Take his name, too," ordered the viceroy, "and remind me, Yatter, to glance over your notes when I have leisure."

"Yes, Mr. Graaf. And, pardon me, sir, but your train is leaving in ten minutes, sir."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You have the taxi waiting, Yatter," said Graaf calmly. "Did you note the time from the station to this store?"

"Six minutes, sir."

"Very well, we will go, Yatter. Good day, gentlemen. Always a pleasure to renew acquaintance."

Spackman trotted after him to the taxi at the curb, and Max Fripp closed the doors of the store again reverently.

As the motor of the taxi roared a vice-regal salute to its distinguished passenger, Morris Tandy hurled a frankfurter across the store at Roy Lewis, hitting him in the face.

"Get some more inspiration out o' that, you poor simp!" he yelled, "and go home and study your rule book."

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD-FASHIONED THINGS.

ON a Sunday morning Eva Jones and Nevil Craig took a train to Vickerstown. Both felt that it was a vain thing to do, for it was evident that Natalie did not mean to be caught; but it was the only place they had heard of, to which she might go for refuge in sickness or distress.

Neither of them knew the name of the aunt; so Nevil went into a drug store in the village, and asked for information. The elderly druggist remembered that a Bent family once lived in Vickerstown, and upon searching his memory farther he recalled that the Widow Andrews, up the hill by the church, had been a Miss Bent.

Mrs. Andrews was at home, and she reluctantly admitted that she was the aunt of Natalie Bent. She was a woman of doubtful age, bent and furrowed by a lifetime of farm drudgery, and rural life had not kept her nature sweet or charitable. Her ancient home was guarded against sunlight and fresh air, and she grudgingly permitted the visitors to take chairs on the porch.

"But I can't tell you nothing about Natalie Bent," she warned them. "How'd you come to be lookin' for her, you two? Had any trouble with 'er?"

"Mr. Craig is engaged to be married to your niece," Eve explained. "Natalie was living in Westcombe, you know. We worked in the same store there, and roomed together. The other day she went away suddenly, and we can't find out where she is, or anything about her."

"Owed you some money, mebbe?"

"No, she didn't. She's my dearest friend, Mrs. Andrews, and we both love her dearly, and want her back again."

"You haven't much money, have you, young man?" demanded the crone.

"Why—er—no, I haven't very much," said Nevil, surprised.

"I thought not! That's why she went off an' didn't get married to you. I gave her a good home here, but she was flighty and she put on airs. Had to go to the city an' make money. Her father was like that—he wa'n't like the rest of us Bents; he was a scalawag, always runnin' off to make a fortune, an' coming back home to get help.

"Her ma didn't have good sense neither. The Lord took 'em—an' I guess He knew what was best for 'em. I've washed my hands o' that Natalie, but I don't wish her no harm."

"Natalie's a good girl, Mrs. Andrews," said Eva curtly. "You've no reason not to be proud of her."

"I haven't seen anything about 'er to be proud of, miss! She might 'a' stayed on here, an' got a good man, an' prospered. But not her! She was too light-headed Liked to look at herself in the glass too well for a Christian woman! From the time she was sixteen, there was always a lot o' good-for-nothin' young whippersnappers chasin' round here after her—an' they got plenty of encouragement."

Nevil glanced at Eva, and flushed painfully.

"I kep' tellin' her she'd come to no good," went on the woman, "an' she got impident, and said I was narrer-minded. I said I'd ruther be narrer-minded than jus' plain scatter-brained; but good counsel was always what she an' her father couldn't stand from any one.

"There was a flashy kind of a good-for-nothin' drummer come here from Westcombe, sellin' things. He gave the girl

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some candy and things, and she got all excited about it. 'Twan't long after that, she up and went off down to Westcombe to make her fortune—just like her father used to do, an' I've always suspicioned 'twas because that flashy feller lived down that way. I can rec'lect his name was Dane."

Nevil got up suddenly.

"We'll have to go, I guess," he said in a nervous, confused manner. "I'm not sure about the trains."

"I'm sorry I couldn't tell you nothin'," said the woman. "But I wouldn't go worryin' about 'er if I was you, young man. She'll prob'ly come back when she's out o' money. If she don't, you may be just as well off; I can't somehow figger Natalie bein' a good savin' wife for any feller."

Eva and Nevil were glad to escape from such an atmosphere, but they waited two hours in the village for the train back to Westcombe.

"I—I wish we hadn't come here," said Nevil dejectedly.

"I'm not bothered about it," said Eva lightly. "I wouldn't give a thought to anything that old crow might say of any one."

He was silent for a long time on the train, then he said, as though thinking aloud:

"I didn't know—that she'd known Vincent Dane so long."

"You make me rather tired, Nevil!" Eva declared. "But—oh, it's all right, at that; I forgive you. Men in love are always jealous about the girl's past life, all the way back to the time she was a baby in the cradle. A man seems to think that a girl never had any right to live until she met him."

He laughed grimly, and was silent for the rest of the journey.

In the evening he started to leave the boarding house for a walk alone, but, to his amazement, Miss Evelyn Kinnock halted him on the porch.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Craig?" she said cordially.

"I—I beg pardon?" he questioned, mystified.

"Please sit down," she said coaxingly.

He hesitated, but in sudden embarrassment he obeyed.

"I know why you don't like me, Mr. Craig," she said, smiling whimsically. "It's because you don't understand me at all. It's because you think I was so—so friendly, perhaps, with that extraordinary Mrs. Waters.

"I thought that almost any one would understand. Mrs. Waters was a—oh, a real specimen! I had to examine her under the microscope, don't you see? Maybe you're not interested in types, Mr. Craig. I always feel that all the world's a laboratory, and I've just got to put all the queer, quaint, fascinating specimens under the microscope."

"I suppose I'm a specimen," said Nevil, regaining his composure as he became irritated.

"But not—not that way," she laughed. "You know I thought you and I were going to be great friends. Then there was so much excitement here all at once, and—it was quite bewildering. I never meant to be horrid or rude to you, or to Miss Bent, really.

"Can't you see that I was deliberately playing up to that woman; I was developing Mrs. Waters, as it were; but I fear that I carried the experiment too far. She got overdeveloped.

"At the last, you know, I had to snub the creature quite brutally. She got positively vulgar—positively crude and vulgar. She was more ordinary than I suspected. But she was distinctly a Dickens type, wasn't she?"

"Was she?" asked Nevil blankly. "What kind of a type do you think I am?"

"Oh, dear me!" she laughed. "I haven't really classified you yet, Mr. Craig. But I know! You're right out of Thackeray—very serious, and rather sentimental, and quite gallant."

"Do you think so?" he queried, a little skeptically.

"Oh, don't be so suspicious!" she protested, with a pout. "Let's be serious now, Mr. Craig. You know, I've taken the liberty of watching you quite a bit, and—I'm perfectly sincere—I think there's something very beautiful about your devotion to Miss Bent.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I really haven't the slightest idea why she went away like that, but you've appeared so broken-hearted about it. I'm inclined to think that you're a real old-fashioned lover."

"I always thought that a man should love a girl if he wanted to marry her," he said naïvely.

"I like that!" she exclaimed. "That's Thackeray for you! I love old-fashioned things, and old-fashioned sentiment. I wonder—you'll forgive me, won't you?—I wonder if Miss Bent appreciated what a fortunate girl she was."

"She didn't go away to—to get away from me," said Nevil defensively. "She wrote to me that—that—well, she got to thinking that she ought not to marry me. She said it was all for my sake."

"But how beautiful!" cried Miss Kinnock fervently. "I'm so glad you're telling me these things, Mr. Craig. I'm very much flattered that you feel that you can tell me. I had no idea that such a quaint and charming romance was being worked out right here. Miss Bent never talked much, you know, and I didn't have a chance to get acquainted with her at all. What a lovely, unselfish nature she must have!"

"Yes," said Nevil.

"But I'm sure you'll find her again," she assured him. "The course of true love—you know—it certainly never does run smooth; but journeys end in lovers' meetings, remember that. You must have courage—you'll be reunited with your charming Phyllis, and there'll be a happy, happy ending."

"Phyllis?" he queried.

"I was merely getting poetical," she explained. "Phyllis, the lovely Dresden-china shepherdess—and you're a perfect Strephon, right out of Arcady—Pan's pipes and everything."

"I didn't go to college, you know," said Nevil apologetically.

"But don't you read old poetry?"

"Not much."

"I'll let you take some of my books, Mr. Craig. You're just the sort to adore poetry, but you haven't discovered it yet. Will you let me choose some things for you to read?"

"Why, yes, thank you," he said uncertainly.

"But here I am chattering to you here, and you were going out for a walk, weren't you? I mustn't keep you another minute. I thought of taking a walk, too. Would you mind very much if I came with you, Mr. Craig?"

"Of course not," he said soberly, "if you want to."

CHAPTER XIV.

COFFEE FOR ONE.

HENRY SPACKMAN rarely condescended to exchange little personal confidences with his employees, but one day he came into the store after luncheon so thrilled with triumph and joy that he flourished a bank check about his head and hilariously invited the world to examine it and congratulate him on his good fortune.

It was the check of Underwood & Co., popular brokers of Westcombe, for two thousand four hundred dollars, and no one failed to observe that it was clearly made out to the order of Henry R. Spackman.

"It's not exactly the first one, boys," the manager explained. "I've made a few killings before, but—this is good, eh?"

"You said it, boss!" cried Morris Tandy, hoarse with emotion. "I'd like to get the hosses to run for me to that kind of a tune."

"Horses!" sniffed the manager contemptuously. "That's a piker's game, Tandy; they never do run for anybody—very long. Might as well spend your money on a good time as throw it all away on the races.

"I don't know why people are so scared of Wall Street. It's simple enough for any man, if you study it a little. It's business. What does a feller want to gamble for, when he can invest his money in legitimate business and pull out checks like this one?

"I knew the market was going to turn just the way it did," he continued loftily. "I told them over at Underwood's what was going to happen this week, and I guess some of 'em wish they'd listened to me. I'd have tipped you fellers off, but what

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good would it do? You'd rather sneak into that dirty old cigar store on Depot Street and squander your good money on the hand-book."

"I pulled out a hundred an' fifty dollars on a two-dollar parlay once," said Tom Raynes solemnly.

"Yeah!" sneered the manager. "And how many two-dollar parlays have stayed right in that hand-book feller's pocket in the last ten years of your sporting life, Tom?"

"The little ol' African golf balls for mine, gents!" chuckled Vincent Dane. "I roll my own! That's sure a good-looking piece of paper you got, boss, but I've seen better money than that layin' right on the ground in a crap game. An' the bones have rolled for this boy, too, when the kale was right there."

A woman customer at the fruit stand looked scandalized, and Spackman recovered his dignity suddenly.

"There's work to do, boys," he said gravely. "A little fun is a good thing, but you know I don't approve of gambling; and we're not here to stand around and tell stories."

Nevil Craig had been an interested listener, and he wondered why the manager could not take his advice to the race-track gamblers to himself. There was the check for twenty-four hundred dollars, but one might well ask how many checks over Spackman's own signature had gone into the Underwood office and never come out again.

Gambling of all sorts was rife among the clerks, and it kept them poverty-stricken and perpetually worried. Now and then a wave of better understanding and remorse would sweep over the group, and there would be a wholesale swearing off and a movement in favor of savings-banks and life insurance.

Then some one would bring a story of a killing made on a hand-book bet, or a small fortune won on a secret baseball pool, and the poor sheep would be off again, ready to follow the leader into clover, or over a precipice.

Nevil knew that Spackman received a salary of seventy-five dollars a week, with a small percentage on the store's gross sales, and it was generally regarded as a handsome income for a chain-store manager; but Spackman lived in one of the poorer streets, renting half of a two-family house, and he possessed neither a motor car nor a radio set, which were the visible symbols of well-to-do respectability in Westcombe.

He had a wife and three half-grown children, and when they visited the store they appeared a little down at the heel, comparing not very favorably with the families of some of the clerks.

It seemed only too evident that a major part of the manager's income went into speculation, and Nevil wondered grimly what other funds had followed the same course.

Vincent Dane was on more or less familiar terms with all the men in the store, having been one of the frequent visitors to drop in and swap yarns with them before there was any prospect of his being added to the staff; nevertheless, the sour-tempered senior clerk at the grocery counter chose to treat him as a raw recruit, and there was a cessation in the hazing of Nevil Craig.

"You're the new guy, Vincent," Lewis reminded Dane for the second time that afternoon. "There's something to do besides resting yourself and listening to the old man's monologues. You're supposed to keep an eye on the shelves, and there isn't a can of the J B X coffee up there. Give yourself a little exercise. Snap to it!"

"Hey, Max!" called Dane to the boy at the fruit stand. "Pass the word down to Jake that we're out of J B X coffee."

"Chase yourself!" returned Max indignantly. "Pass the buck to some one your size."

"Can the funny stuff, Vincent," said Lewis brusquely. "We'll have a customer waiting for it pretty soon, and the boss gets sore if we don't keep an eye on the stock."

Dane stretched himself and groaned.

"No system here—that's the trouble," he complained. "A real store would have a phone wired to the basement, and the porter would rustle the stuff up when it was needed. I could 'a' had a job down

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the freight house if I'd wanted it, but I'm a salesman, not a jackass!"

"Glad you've put us wise," said Lewis. "I was wondering."

Dane left the counter and proceeded slowly and wearily toward the basement, stuffing his hands in his pockets.

"There's a reason!" observed Clifford Hartree in a low voice. "Vincent had a run-in with Jake Mance downstairs yesterday. That's nothing new, but I've got an idea that Vincent's kind of scared. He could lick that old stiff with one hand, but maybe he don't know it. Jake must 'a' handed him a hot line o' talk."

Nevil smiled reminiscently. Jake was becoming a picturesque factor in the life of the store, a fire-breathing dragon that presided over the treasure in the nether regions. His spirited battle with the big fellow apparently settled things between them, for there had been no resumption of hostilities. Jake growled and muttered when they chanced to meet, but that was nothing more than his natural manner.

Five minutes passed, and another five.

"A pound of J B X coffee!" ordered a customer, handing Hartree a dollar bill, and indicating that he was in a hurry.

"Good grief!" exclaimed Lewis. "Where is that guy with the coffee? Has he stopped for a nap in the potato bin? Take a run down there, Craig, and shake 'em up."

Nevil moved off promptly, but he was not pleased. He had studiously avoided all unnecessary contact with Dane, and in a few days there had risen between them a barrier of cold reserve that seemed to be mutually acceptable. He decided that he would make short work of the errand if he could find the coffee and transport it himself.

As he went down into the semidarkness of the cellar he heard no voices, but an indistinct murmur, and a slow shuffling of feet on the concrete floor came to his ears an instant later.

The place was darker than usual, and Nevil, for his own convenience, felt out the switch box on the wall, and turned on the lights. Then he saw Jake Mance skulking along the aisle between the rows of barrels, fists clenched, and square jaw set belligerently. Vincent Dane stood erect near the furnace, apparently waiting for the attack, and he looked ugly.

"Oh, cut it!" Nevil exclaimed angrily. "What's the matter with this place anyhow? Do you think you own this cellar, Jake? Can't any one come down here and get what he's sent for?"

"Beat it, young feller!" ordered Jake gruffly. "I ain't after you, an' you can be thankful for that."

"Much obliged, I'm sure," Dane said sarcastically to the would-be peacemaker, "but I don't need you to protect me, Craig. Keep out o' the way, and I'll fix this bum so he won't make any more trouble for anybody."

"It's no affair of mine," said Nevil curtly, "but if this foolishness goes on, some one will get hurt down here, and we'll have the police butting in. There's nonsense in it."

"I always get the blame!" muttered Jake, and for an instant he was oddly pathetic, as a melancholy hippopotamus might be pathetic. "This feller started it yesterday. The guys upstairs set 'im on to pick on me, an' he said I was a bum, an' a dirty wharf rat. I wasn't lookin' for a fight, an' I told 'im to get out an' keep out o' my way. Now he comes down here an' says right off that he's goin' to settle me right."

"I'll get the coffee, Dane," said Nevil. "What do you want to make all this trouble for?"

"Oh, you trying to boss the new man, too?" sneered Dane. "Well, you'd better think over it, kid. You've got something coming to yer, remember—but I've been giving you a rest. You've had your troubles, I suppose, but it all came of your not knowing when you were well off.

"You're a lucky boy! That jane only got into you for a bargain-counter sparkler, but if she hadn't sized you up for a piker she might 'a' strung you along quite awhile, the way she did me. I'll admit I was a sucker, but I never fell for 'er as hard as you did."

Nevil quietly slipped off his white jacket with its high collar.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It might as well come now," he said tensely.

"You keep out of it, young feller!" cried the porter. "He's pickin' on you now, so's to get rid o' mixin' it up with me."

As he spoke, he crouched low and started for Dane. The latter fell back a step, leaned forward slightly, and swung his right hand behind him. Nevil's eye caught a gleam of bright metal.

"Look out, Jake!" Nevil yelled, and leaped at Dane, clutching his right arm in both hands.

Dane whirled about and grappled with him, furious at the unexpected attack, and they crashed into the row of barrels, fell to the floor, and knocked Jake's feet from under him as he got in their way.

Nevil fought to retain his grip on that right arm, and though Dane was hammering him with a powerful left, he twisted the wrist sharply, bent the hand back till the tendons snapped, and flung away the object that he was after.

"Brass knuckles!" cried Jake, as he caught the gleam of the falling weapon. "Brass knuckles for me, hey?"

His big teeth showed between the drawn lips like a bulldog's, and he darted into the writhing mass on the floor, and groped with his huge hands for the hold that he wanted.

"Keep off, Jake!" gasped Nevil; and Vincent Dane swore, and kicked wildly at the porter.

But the groping hands found Dane's neck, and clutched it between them.

There was a noise on the stairs, shouts and cries of alarm, and running feet could be heard on the floor boards overhead.

"Jake, you're killing 'im!" cried Nevil, as he felt himself freed from the suddenly relaxed hold of his opponent.

"Sure!" Jake muttered grimly.

Then Tom Raynes and Clifford Hartree threw themselves into the mêlée, and Nevil joined them in overpowering the big fellow and dragging him away from his victim.

Dane was senseless, and Hartree felt his pulse anxiously. Tom Raynes caught up a fire bucket, and dashed the stagnant water over the still form.

"Get the police!" ordered Spackman excitedly, as he viewed the scene with frightened eyes.

"Who wants police?" snarled Tom Raynes. "Get a doctor."

Roy Lewis uncorked a bottle of household ammonia, and held it to the nostrils of the man on the floor. There was a convulsive shudder, and Dane gasped, opened his eyes, and struggled to sit up.

"Who did this?" demanded Spackman.

Dane made a gurgling noise in his throat, and pointed an accusing finger at Craig.

"He's a liar!" declared Tom Raynes. "I saw most of the mill from the stairs, and Craig gave 'im a good fight. It was Jake that did all the harm—butting in when he wasn't needed."

Jake scrambled among the barrels, disappeared for a moment, then darted out with the bright brass knuckles in his hand.

"Look a' that!" he shouted, thrusting the object close to Spackman's face. "He come down here with 'em to get me! He'd 'a' cracked my skull with 'em! The young feller—he saved my life!"

"I saw that," testified Hartree. "I was on the stairs. I saw Craig jump, and catch his arm when he swung it."

"Brass knuckles!" gasped Tom Raynes, staring at the impressive weapon. "Well, wha' do yer think o' that low-down dirty rat?"

CHAPTER XV.

PAID IN FULL.

THE only immediate result of the battle in the cellar was the elimination of Vincent Dane as a factor in the vexing problems of the store. He did not appear there on the day after the incident, and Spackman admitted sullenly to Tom Raynes that he would not return.

"That egg was stale when it was shipped," said Roy Lewis. "What the boss wanted 'im here for, is more than I can see. I guess he got all his territory sold on vacuum cleaners, and he needed a change. He and the boss are about as much alike as black and white, but they've always been kind o' thick."

Nevil held his own opinion on the mat-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ter. Spackman had added Dane to the staff at a time when no extra man was needed in the grocery department, and at the time when it became generally known that a bitter enmity had grown up between the two young men.

No one would look for great subtlety or cunning in Henry Spackman, but he certainly would welcome any chance to rid himself of the tenacious young clerk who refused to be discharged, and the reputation of Vincent Dane suggested such a chance.

The manager received an official communication from the New York office two days after the trouble in the basement, and its contents aggravated his gloom and irritation.

"I wish you fellers could learn to keep your mouths shut sometimes," he said crossly to Nevil, as he halted at the grocery counter in his agitated pacing to and fro.

"Here I've got a letter from the main office, and I'm ordered to get an architect and a contractor, and have designs made for new fixtures and a whole new layout for this counfounded store. There's no sense in it, and it all comes of Billy Graaf making some recommendations when he couldn't think of anything else to do. You put the idea in his head, Craig, and he thought probably it might make a hit with the big boss down there."

"You all picked on me for handing the sales manager a line o' bunk," said Roy Lewis. "I guess I'm not always such a fool as I look to be. I don't go putting ideas in their heads that'll make us a lot o' trouble."

"That's it—trouble!" growled Spackman. "When I don't have time enough to get my office work up to date, I've got to have this place all ripped up and made over. There's an appropriation of eight hundred dollars for the job, and this letter says I'm to be congratulated that they've picked this store to try the experiment on. If it works out all right, the new fixtures will be made standard for the whole chain."

"Never mind, boss," said Morris Tandy, "contractors slip a little commission to the man that gives out the contract."

"Wha—what's that? What do you mean?" cried Spackman angrily.

"No offense, boss," said Tandy. "I was only thinking what I'd do if I was manager."

"It's a feather in your bonnet, Craig," remarked Hartree. "But I suppose Billy Graaf claimed the whole idea as his own."

"Nothing of the kind!" snapped Spackman. "I'm directed to raise Craig's pay five dollars a week, to show that the active interest of employees in the business is appreciated and duly rewarded. That's what it says in the letter; and that's all right, as far as I'm concerned; but any clerk can read up a lot of ideas in the trade papers, and then shoot them out as his own stuff."

The manager was plainly roused to the pitch of hostility, but Nevil refrained from encouraging an argument.

"I can use five dollars more per week, I guess," he said quietly, "and I'm sure it's mighty white of the main office to do that."

At the noon hour Nevil went to the back room for his hat and coat, and met Spackman there.

"There'll be a showdown some day between you and me, Craig," said the manager. "Such conditions can't go on forever. You think you're pretty clever, currying favor with the headquarters people, and getting yourself mentioned to the old man himself, but you can't make a fool of me, you know."

"I haven't tried to curry favor with anybody," said Nevil, "but I don't mind standing in well with headquarters. I might have to appeal to them for a hearing if—"

"Don't go into that again," snapped the manager. "If you keep on, I'll be the one to demand an investigation. I'll produce all the leading business men of this town as character witnesses, and I'll prove that I never accepted a penny of graft in my life.

"Who are you? A kid from the country—and you gave me a hundred and a quarter to keep it quiet that your girl knocked down money from the cash drawer! Any judge would compliment me for being tender-hearted and merciful."

"But the main office would want to know why you didn't put the matter up to them," said Nevil. "I don't think that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

managers are allowed the privilege of hushing up cases of grand larceny, on their own authority."

"If you'll get out of this store," said Spackman desperately, "I'll guarantee to give you a recommend, and use my influence to put you in any other store in the chain. What do you want to stay here for? You talk about my hushing up grand larceny, and all that! You're a party to it all yourself, just as much as I am."

"That's exactly why I'm staying," was the reply. "I'm not the kind to compound a felony without a pretty strong reason for it, and I've got to justify myself if I can."

The manager flung his arms above his head in a gesture of helpless rage, and rushed out of the store.

At the boarding house Nevil had become the star boarder by acclamation. Eva Jones and Clifford Hartree magnified his part in the recent battle until he figured as the heroic champion of the much-abused porter, and the avenger of all the indignities that the house had suffered from the despised Vincent Dane.

Eva lost no time in reporting that the store was to be modernized and beautified according to the recommendations of the young man, and enthusiasm ran high.

"It just happened to work out that way," said Nevil to Evelyn Kinnock when she congratulated him. "Any other man could have told the sales manager the same thing."

"But the other men never do!" she protested. "Genius is genius simply because it actually does things, don't you see? The other men always stand by, and say that they could have done the same thing."

"There's no genius about this thing," insisted Nevil. "It's as simple as saying that a house ought to have door and windows."

"But your New York office commended you! They don't do that sort of thing, Mr. Craig, for nothing. Really, you know, I'm quite proud to have the honor of sitting beside you at table. I've often thought of all the poor unknown, mediocre persons who have been associated with great men during their progress up to the heights. Isn't it interesting?

"There must have been scores of men and women who were intimate associates of Lincoln, and Grant, and Lee, and—oh, all the great heroes, but we never hear about them, unless they happen to write books on their wonderful experiences.

"Some day," she continued with charming earnestness, "all the boarders at this table may be telling their grandchildren that they knew Nevil Craig, the merchant prince, when he was just a salesman in a small store in Westcombe."

"Oh, pshaw! You're making fun of me, Miss Kinnock. I know too much about myself, I guess, to get much of a swelled head. I'll be a lucky man if I'm making as much as our manager is, at his age. It isn't all so easy for men that haven't been through good schools and colleges."

"You should read biographies, Mr. Craig. You'd be somewhat astonished, I think, if you would take the trouble to find out how many of the greatest men in the world never went to school at all."

"But they were born great. If I had been born that way, I shouldn't have come to Westcombe to get a job in a grocery store. A lot of young men to-day are already famous at my age, and I'm—nowhere at all."

"Well, you needn't listen to me if you don't want to!" she said, with an engaging little shrug.

"But I do!" he exclaimed earnestly. "You make me feel almost—well, kind of important, Miss Kinnock."

"Then I haven't striven in vain," she laughed. "I've got another book that I really want you to read, Mr. Craig. I'll give it to you this evening, if you don't mind."

Nevil walked back to the store with Eva Jones, and she seemed a little out of sorts.

"You've given up finding Natalie, haven't you," she asked suddenly.

"Why—why, no, of course I haven't."

"But you're not trying to find her, are you?"

"What can I do?" he demanded, a little hurt. "How are we to know if she's within a thousand miles of here? There isn't a single clue or anything. All I can do is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to wait; and she might—well, I might hear something from her some day."

"Meanwhile," said Eva severely, "you're bearing up wonderfully under the worry and grief, aren't you?"

"Why, Eva!" he cried, staring at her in amazement.

"Oh, it's none of my business," she said apologetically. "I had no right to say anything like that. But—it makes me kind o' sick to hear that girl go on with her highbrow stuff. And—oh, I can't see but what you think she's pretty good company."

"Well, I don't know but what she is pretty good company!" he returned spiritedly. "And I don't see why I shouldn't talk to a girl that sits by me at the table, just because Natalie went off and left me."

"Oh, you're perfectly right!" said Eva stiffly. "I beg your pardon for speaking like that; I won't do it again."

He was rather miserable all the afternoon as a result of the little skirmish, and he asked himself repeatedly if he was being disloyal to Natalie. Reflecting on the situation, he felt, guiltily enough, that he had not been properly depressed and forlorn of late.

But the affairs at the store had absorbed his attention. He had to work, and he had a career to build up for himself. Natalie had left him of her own accord, and if there were any injustice or cruelty in the separation he was certainly the victim and the sufferer.

As for Eva's feelings about Miss Kinnock, they were absurd, he told himself. Miss Kinnock was undoubtedly a superior person of no small attainments, and if she condescended to notice him and be kind to him, he certainly would not show a churlish lack of appreciation.

At night he returned alone to the house, feeling himself a victim of unfair judgment, and he was inclined to show Eva Jones that he could be quite independent of her opinion on matters of conduct.

There was a letter for him on the hall stand, bearing a New York postmark, and he tore open the envelope with vague excitement. A post office money order was folded into a sheet of note paper, and it was made out for two hundred and five dollars. On the paper was a roughly drafted form of a statement of account:

NATALIE BENT	
TO NEVIL CRAIG, DR.:	
Money loaned	$125.00
One diamond ring	80.00
	$205.00

At the bottom of the page were some hastily written lines of fine script.

I earned the money myself. You understand now, of course, Nevil, that you are free. But I shall always love you. NATALIE.

There was no address, nothing but the New York postmark to indicate whence the astonishing message had come.

He went upstairs with the papers clutched in a trembling hand, and did not appear at the dinner table.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE UNFAMILIAR FACE.

ON the Saturday preceding Labor Day the clerks in the store were driven to strenuous efforts to cope with the rush of business. Housewives were laying in supplies for the three days, and preparing for holiday celebrations.

Nevil had been worried and rather morose since receiving the money order and the meager message, and he welcomed any unusual activity as a diversion and relief. He had not cashed the money order, and he told himself that he would never do so, yet there was nothing else to do with it.

After the first day of puzzling over it, he gravely took Eva Jones into his confidence again, and she wept over the note, and found even the official money order a strain on her emotions.

"But aren't you going to New York?" she demanded.

"I don't know," he said miserably. "What could I do there? There are millions of people. I might as well start walking from here to San Francisco, looking for Natalie all the way. I suppose I'd still be walking and looking when I was a white-haired old man."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If I were a man, and I loved Natalie as you said you did," she told him, "I'd never rest nor sleep until I found her."

"I haven't rested," he said wearily, "but you can't help sleeping after the first shock has worn off.

"And I wish you wouldn't tell me what I ought to do," he added indignantly. "You don't know what's going on in my mind, Eva, and you needn't think I haven't suffered, just because I don't act like a woman with the hysterics."

She apologized again, and a coldness developed between them that was something of a relief to the young man.

Spackman had the blue prints of the alterations in his office, and he announced gruffly on Saturday morning that the carpenters would start the general ruin of the place immediately after Labor Day.

The closing hour was advanced to eleven o'clock that night, on account of the unusual crowd, and the store was not cleared of customers until a half hour after that time. The weary Max Fripp dragged in his sidewalk stand of fruit, and banged the double doors vigorously upon the last departing shopper. Then Spackman directed that the doors should be locked, and told the clerks to leave by the rear door, lest there should be another invasion by belated buyers.

There was a general protest against the inhumanity of employers as the clerks were forced to set their counters in order and sweep the aisles, and it was after midnight when quiet was established, and there were but four persons left in the store.

Eva Jones voluntarily remained to cast up the day's receipts and help the manager tie the money in bags to be placed in the safe, and Nevil Craig waited for her, insisting that it was too late for her to walk home alone. Down in the basement Jake Mance inspected the ice machine, and put his domain in order for the holiday rest.

At twelve thirty a motor car was driven into the alley in the rear of the store, and while Nevil was listening curiously for sounds of possible visitors, three men, wearing long raincoats, and with cloths covering their faces, darted into the store, and covered the occupants with pistols.

"Put 'em up!" ordered the foremost robber.

Henry Spackman started to rush from the glass inclosure, but one of the men struck him in the face and knocked him down.

"Don't shoot!" gasped the manager. "We give up. Don't hurt the girl."

Nevil, with a pistol aimed directly at his head, raised his arms above his head and awaited further developments.

The apparent leader of the trio stepped quickly into the office and began stuffing the bags of money into a large traveling bag, but he paused suddenly and gave a cry of warning.

"Where's the girl?" he gasped.

Eva had dropped behind her desk and disappeared.

All at once there was a crash of window glass, and the startled Nevil turned his head and saw one of the front windows shattered to splinters as though a bomb had been hurled through it.

"Beat it!" yelled the leader.

The dark head of the girl bobbed up from behind the grocery counter, and she flung a large can of tomatoes through the plate glass of one of the doors. Outside a policeman's whistle sounded shrilly.

The man who was covering Nevil fired at Eva as she ducked down behind the counter, and then Nevil jumped upon him, grabbing for the weapon.

"Get 'im!" yelled the man, and tried to turn the gun upon his assailant.

The leader darted out of the office with the bag in his hand, then dropped it, and snatched up a cleaver.

Eva Jones screamed in terror, and Nevil, struggling with his man, saw the cleaver raised above his head.

But Jake Mance, heavy and ponderous, miraculously cleared the distance from the back room door in a leap. His great hand wrenched the cleaver from the robber, and one sweep of the heavy weapon, with the flat of the blade to the front, laid the man senseless on the floor.

Jake whirled, and flung Nevil's opponent away from him, but the man, acting with lightning speed, recovered his balance, snatched the bag that was dropped by the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fallen leader, and plunged into the darkness of the back room.

The third robber fired two shots into the floor close to the feet of Jake and Nevil, then, menacing them with the pistol, backed through the rear door, and followed his comrade.

Two policemen were now battering at the front doors with their clubs, and Nevil shouted and signaled them to run through the alley, where the motor of the car was popping like a machine gun.

A moment later they dashed in through the rear door.

"Did they get anything?" cried one of the patrolmen.

"Of course they did, you fat head!" wailed Spackman, rising from the office floor. "To-day's receipts—over eight thousand dollars!—that's what they got—and got away with it."

"You can't chase a car on foot," said the officer, "but we fired at 'em. They've gone, but we'll get 'em. Who's this guy?"

He knelt by the side of the unconscious robber and jerked away the black cloth that covered his face.

"You got him right!" he exclaimed, looking at the white face. "But he's new to this town. Imported to do this particular job!"

Eva Jones crawled from beneath the counter, sobbing hysterically, and Nevil took her in his arms protectingly and tried to comfort her.

"You did more than any one else here, Eva," he said. "All Jake did was to save my life—and that wasn't so much, Jake, but I'm grateful."

"We're square now, young feller!" Jake declared, and grinned for the first time in the knowledge of the witnesses.

"Who—who's that—on the floor?" asked the girl fearfully.

"Nobody knows," said Nevil.

He looked over the patrolman's shoulder curiously at the quiet body, and he felt strangely disappointed. He was still bewildered by the drama that had been acted out at such lightning speed, but he realized that he had watched the removal of the robber's mask with a tense expectancy. He had thought, somehow, that the face would be familiar.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

TURNED DOWN

SHE was quick with a gun an' slick with a rope,
An' the steers knew when she was bidin',
An' they never pulled any monkey-shines
When that girl on the range was ridin'—
She was fearless about every cussed thing,
Only from love was she hidin'!

She rode 'em hard an' she rode 'em rough,
All over the range an' back,
An' never a colt was born that wouldn't
Follow right after her track—
But never a man could touch her hand,
'Less he wanted a wallopin' smack!

Now a white-collar's got her to fall for him,
A dude-ranch chap out sportin',
An' they tell me he's got her roped an' tied,
But I'll bet she done the courtin'—
For I'm one of the hombres what knows her stuff,
An' from which she done her sortin'!

Peter A. Lea.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At Good Old Bearpike

By RALPH E. MOONEY

IT was a day in September. Bearpike University was dozing in the hot sun of late afternoon.

Old Bearpike was generally dozing. It was a big city college and it had two kinds of students; one kind that got up so early they could barely keep awake during the eight and nine o'clock lectures and another that did well to get up in time to make the eleven o'clocks.

One kind thought Phi Delta Theta was a set of letters in the Greek alphabet and the other could make out a pledge pin at three hundred yards. Neither kind knew the other was in school, and Bearpike never looked as if it had any students until it was time to turn on the electric lights.

Up on the first quadrangle, about twelve people were in evidence, six frat men and six co-eds, all keeping in the shade at the base of the red granite walls of Brooks Hall, Norman Hall, or Bliss Hall. From this quadrangle, a long double line of trees shaded a walk that led back to the second quadrangle, composed of buildings of the engineering school.

There wasn't a soul in sight on the walk or in the quadrangle. Another long, shady walk led past the chapel and dormitories to the gymnasium and football field.

The chapel was closed—it wasn't Sunday—and the dormitories were quiet, although every window was open to ventilate the sleeping rooms. On some tennis courts near the gym, eight or ten men were playing.

On a practice field, which had goal posts at either end, sixteen boys in track shirts and canvas breeches were trotting feebly about, making noises like football players. Do you get the picture?

Inside the gymnasium building was an office where Duke Halliburton, coach of the Bearpike team, was in conference with Dan White, line coach. Halliburton was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wiping cold perspiration from his forehead and White was sitting with his elbows on his knees, his face resting in his hands.

"Good Heavens!" said Halliburton. "Good Heavens! Good Heavens!"

"Um-huh!" grunted White, reflectively.

"I'm sorry to get you into this," went on Halliburton, "but, good Heavens, could I foresee what was coming? Listen, White, the alumni and a few of the trustees of this school suddenly went football mad. They found out my contract with Overland had expired and they came after me. They wouldn't give up. They outbid everybody. They promised me everything.

"They gave luncheons and dinners and made speeches until I was dizzy. So I finally accepted and wired for you. And now—now we find that there are only twenty-five men on the varsity squad and that they haven't all reported yet, although school has been open a week and the first game is due on the twenty-fifth. Could I, I ask you, could I expect—"

"I don't blame you, Hallie, I'm just trying to realize."

Halliburton's voice broke on a note of incredulous amazement.

"Last year's fullback and center have so many social engagements in the city they can't get out till next Thursday. If they're like the rest of the varsity, it won't matter whether they come at all or not. Oh, this team will be hopeless. Hopeless. Our only chance to make good is next year. Perhaps the freshman squad has some material that can be—"

"Freshman squad, nineteen men," reported White dully. "Eleven high school tackles, one end and seven candidates that have never played before."

"What!" It was a gasp.

"I saw them with my own eyes," answered White. "I heard them talk. I cannot tell a lie."

"It's impossible," said Halliburton. "What were the scouts doing? Whitey, I would almost bet they didn't have any scouts."

"I would have said it was impossible, sir, but now I say nothing is impossible. The word impossible has been crossed out of my dictionary."

Halliburton had made his reputation at colleges where the head coach was a strategist and the minor coaches were generals and where they had as many scouts as they had players. It was his custom, ordinarily, to trim the varsity from seventy to forty players during spring practice so he could concentrate his energies during the fall.

"This school has been asleep for twenty years and now it wants to wake up famous. We're supposed to build a championship team this year. We're supposed to line up ten big games next year. Sixteen men turn out for varsity fall practice and the grand stand was built in 1903. The gate receipts wouldn't pay the railroad fare of a big ten team. We—we've said we would do it."

"Have we?" said White. "Then I see I can tell a lie after all."

Just then some one outside the office struck a match. A cloud of cigarette smoke eddied past the door. A lithe, shadowy man walked by hesitantly, walked by again and finally came in, with a perfunctory nod and a cough.

Halliburton, who thought it might be a football candidate, was puzzled when he gave the visitor the once-over. The man was thirty years old, at least. He was very small and weighed about one hundred and twenty-five pounds.

His skin was clear and healthy and he carried himself with vast assurance. One ear was doubled and thickened in a way that indicated he had taken punishment at some stage of his career. His nose was bent and the injury seemed to have affected his breathing, for it was noisy and somewhat labored.

"How d' do?" he said. "Say, boys, I'm looking for Duke Halliburton."

Halliburton introduced himself.

"My name's Regan," explained the little man. "They call me Kid Regan. I've boxed around the country. Did you never hear of me?"

"Well — no," answered Halliburton, "what can I do for you?"

Regan grinned.

"You'd be surprised," he said. "I'm one of the collitch boys. On the level, I'm a freshman here. Why? Well, I'm through boxing, see? I get dizzy after a couple

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rounds and I'm a mark for everything they got. Well, I always like to draw, see? So I thought I'd be a cartoonist. So I signed on at the art school. Ain't I got nerve?"

Halliburton laughed while Regan cocked his head to one side in perfect good nature.

"From prize fighter to artist," said Halliburton. "That's pretty good. I wish you luck."

"Wish nothing," said Regan; 'you're Old Man Luck himself. If you don't come through my act is crabbed. Y'see coach, I haven't got enough money to get by without working. So I figured you'd need a trainer and rubber for th' team. So I figured I was just what you was looking for."

"I've got bad news for you," Halliburton told him.

Regan frowned uneasily.

"Why?"

"Well, there's nothing to train, and one trainer on the job already."

"Oh, that's all right—I'll be head trainer. Honest, you'd oughtn't to spoil that layout down at the art classes. Me, hard-boiled egg, prize fighter and gambler, sitting around with those kids that wears aprons. It's a riot."

Again Halliburton laughed. This time rather shakily.

"Regan, I'm sorry, but there's no chance." He flamed up. "They've got me out here to coach a team, and there is no team. Hardly half a squad. They want big ten stuff when all they need is about fifty first-class football men and a concrete stadium worth a million dollars. Trainer! By thunder, if I have to stay here I'll need a keeper. I'm getting ready to resign."

Regan was not disturbed.

"Hallie," he said casually, "that's just how I felt when they started me to drawing pictures of a square block of wood yesterday morning. 'Hell,' I says, 'I want to make cartoons.' This school is the dopiest place I've ever hit, but you and me and your friend there, we're regular, and we can shake 'em out of it."

"Our squad is a cartoon already," put in White.

"They'll be good practice fer me, then," chuckled Regan. "Now, listen, folks, these fellows around here is all sleepy, but they're kids. Gosh, you can do anything with a kid if you'll condition him. That's where I come in. What that takes I've got. Say, I just wish I had half of the youth some of these lads is sleepin' off here."

"All kidding aside, Regan, I'm afraid we can't use you," concluded Halliburton.

"So I'm hired, hey?"

"I say no."

"Huh? I'm deaf in that ear. I'll report every day at three then. Or was it two thirty? Say, you'll be beggin' me to stay inside two weeks."

"You'll be begging for salary, too."

"*I* ain't worrying about the salary. I know what I kin do." Regan peeled off his coat. "Let me get at them kids right now when they come off the field. I'll show you something."

Halliburton stared at the little prize fighter whose salesmanship was so shrewd and baffling.

"All right, show us," he said. "I'll see if I can get any money for you."

"Thanks, Hallie; this is the first thing you ever done that you won't regret. What is *your* name, brother? White? Shake, boy—we're pardners from now on."

II.

It was another day in September—a cool and frosty one this time.

Conditions at Bearpike had changed somewhat for the better and somewhat for the worse. The varsity squad had been recruited to full strength, and Halliburton's vigorous call had even enlisted five dubious extras so that the total was thirty.

The entire thirty acted as if they had been insulted by the things that had happened to them since the new coach took hold, but they went into frenzies of activity whenever he appeared on the field. They were afraid to stay with him and afraid to quit.

Meanwhile the football schedule had opened, and Bearpike had lost her first game by two touchdowns.

The door of Halliburton's office swung in, and Regan entered, followed by two tons of football material. Two tons com-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pressed into twelve sleek-headed young men.

"Say, coach, here's some friends of mine 'at wants to get on the freshman team. They enters school a little late, but they is each and every one anxious for to play."

Halliburton stared. He was puzzled as to what it was all about, but the twelve candidates looked right. A great thankfulness began to invade him.

"Well—well," he spluttered. "Well! I guess that can be arranged."

"Sure it can," said Regan quickly. "There's nothing in the rules of this conference against a freshman entering hisself late."

"H-m, that's right. Now, let's see—give me your names."

"I'm John Porter," said the nearest of the young men. "I had entered Westgate, but Mr. Regan wrote to me and told me you were coach here, so I decided to change."

The coach jumped a little. He knew something about Westgate and its football methods. He knew this boy would never have been encouraged to go there unless he had real class. He knew also that only some extraordinary inducement could have caused John Porter to leave Westgate for Bearpike.

He was worried and suspicious. Nevertheless, he took the names of the twelve and sent them to Coach White for uniforms.

"How did you get that man Porter to come here?" he demanded of Regan when they were alone.

"Why, coach, he told you. I just wrote and told 'im you were here. They're all anxious to get on your team."

"Go on! Westgate would give a man like that a scholarship, room, and board, and maybe pocket money besides."

"Well, s' help me, that's all I did. I knew the kid's old man, of course. He used to run a sporting club in Columbus, Ohio."

"Well, then, how about this Ed McDonald, who switched from Craketon?"

"Oh, I met him a couple of years ago. I trained at a farm up in his town, and we kind of got to palling around."

"Regan, do you know the rules about professionals on college teams?"

Regan sneered.

"Sure, I know that gag. Don't worry, coach. These boys is all perfect amateurs. They're just friends of mine. I've got five more lined up 'at will come later. Get me right, coach, I'm just trying to play your game and help you along. I heard you say what you needed, and I seen a chance to get it and took the chance. When I work for a guy I always try to give him what he wants. That's my system."

"But we've got to be careful with a college team. Are you sure you didn't promise them anything to come here? Scholarships or money?"

"Coach, you know this school wouldn't come across with no scholarships, and you know I'm broke. Why else 'm I working here as trainer? Furthermore, coach, let me tell you I know this sporting game too well to try to put anything over.

"I've been a hard egg in my time, gambler and prize fighter, and I've learned my lesson. It don't pay to be crooked in sport. Find out the rules and play inside them, is my system. A man's a nut to try anything risky anyhow. It's too easy to play the legit and get by. Why hunt for trouble?"

Halliburton extended his hand enthusiastically.

"Shake. I'm glad to hear you say that. I hope you don't think I thought you were—"

"Aw, fergit it, fergit it! You got to know your eggs, ain't you? Sure! I understand that."

III.

It was an afternoon in November, the second Saturday in November. The little grandstand at Bearpike athletic field was filled with hysterical football fans. They were roaring. They were pounding anything in sight and stamping their feet.

It was the third quarter, and Bearpike was going down the field smoothly and steadily, about to score on one of the strongest teams in the valley conference. Bearpike had gone into the game picked as a sure loser.

Bearpike had upset the dope. She had

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

held a superior attack scoreless, and now, in a sudden burst of confidence, was about to win.

Halliburton, smiling quizzically and quivering with controlled delight, was watching from the bench with White at his side.

"What's got into this team?" asked White. "They're going to win again. The third time in succession."

"Golly!" cried Halliburton. "There they go. They did that well, White. Fine!"

"They didn't look like anything up till three weeks ago," said White, "and then all of a sudden they began to play a whale of a game. Do you suppose it's us?"

"Yip! Yip! It's over! He took it over, White. What do you know about that? Can you believe it?"

"Well, here's the way I look at it," said White a few minutes later. "Every man on the squad is second class, but they began to put all they had into it and they started to play as a team. Now, if a second-class team plays together it begins to look darn near first class.

"Well, who is responsible for team play? Us! Don't you suppose we did it? It's a question of inspiration in a way. We must have furnished it without knowing. I guess it's just what comes of hard work and knowing how. You struggle and struggle and all of a sudden you get results."

Bang!

"There's the gun, White. It's all finished. Fine, boys, fine! Run into the gym now and change before you get chilled. Break training to-night if you want to. Eat anything you like anywhere. Have a good time. Be out at three thirty Monday. Congratulations, Dufhead. That was a nice touchdown. First class. All right, Whitey, let's stroll along. What was it you were saying?"

"Why, coach, all I was getting at was just that hard work and knowing how will conquer any problems."

"Oh, well, that's true, but all the same we'd better not go around hanging medals on ourselves. I'm just beginning to see through this spurt they're making and see we haven't got anything to do with it. It's a first class joke."

"We haven't?" expostulated White. "If we haven't, who gets the credit?"

"Oh, we get the credit, but we don't deserve it. There goes the Victory Bell. They ought to ring it for a year over winning to-day."

"Who does deserve it, Hallie?"

"Regan."

"Hallie, you're crazy!"

"No, I'm not. We furnished the knowledge, yes, but Regan furnishes the spirit. And do you know how he does it? With scorn. I watched him this week and I caught on. You know how the students are all fascinated by him because he used to be a prize fighter? Well, he's got the team feeling the same way. And one little sarcastic word from him will do more to put fighting agony into a man than all our yelling and lecturing on the field."

"Honestly?"

"White, just the other day, Dufhead was terrible. He was tackling around the neck and shrinking when he went at the line. After practice, Regan worked on him. He put on a few little patches of adhesive and rubbed him and then gave him a slap like a jockey would give a mule that was in his way. All he said was this: 'A swell oilcan you are.' And next day Dufhead was tackling low and averaging four yards every buck."

White scratched his head.

"By thunder, you're nearly right if you're not right."

"I know I'm right. Hooray for Regan! I'm going to get him to sign a contract with me for life. And when they ask me what's the biggest thing I've ever done, I'm not going to mention my Overland shift or my running line. I'm going to say: 'I'm the man that discovered Regan.'"

IV.

It was an afternoon in June.

Bearpike University was throbbing with life under a warmish sun. The tennis courts were full, two interfraternity ball games were in progress, and down on the practice field thirty men were polishing up their work on forward passes and punts.

A change had come over Bearpike since

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the football season. Somehow, the little string of three victories hung up just before Thanksgiving had wakened the athletic spirit. Also the school spirit. Bearpike's motto now was, "Heads up, and snap into it!"

One evidence of this was a sizable heap of letters over in the registrar's office, letters from high school and prep school graduates who were anxious to enter Bearpike. The heap foretold a registration in the fall that would break all records.

In the coach's office, in the gymnasium, Line Coach White opened an envelope.

"Great Scott, Hallie! McDonald's flunked in math."

"What?"

"Here's Professor Seebert's report of his grade. Thirty-one. Can you beat that, Hallie? The one man we can't afford to lose. He would be the mainspring of next year's team. This is terrible! I've got fifty freshman recruits signed up, but I'd give them all for him."

Halliburton scratched his head.

"H-m! That is bad. Now let's see—where's Regan?"

"Call young Brooks's room in the dormitories. Brooks and Regan are great friends. They've been putting in their time together all year."

Halliburton took up his telephone and gave a number. Shortly, he had Regan on the line.

"Regan, McDonald has flunked."

"Who flunked'm?" was the irritated response.

"Professor Seebert?"

"Seebert? That little cheese? Listen, you get Seebert and tell him to give Mac another exam, see? Mac 'll pass. I'll 'tend to that."

"What will you do, tutor him in mathematics?"

"Haw! Haw! The pride of the art school teach arithmetic? No, listen, I'll just talk to old Seebert. I know'm pretty good. I been exercisin' him at a little class I organized."

"All right."

Halliburton arranged for a second examination and hung up the receiver.

"That's that," he said confidently.

Which was right, for some ten days later Professor Seebert came in jauntily to call upon the coaches.

"Well, Halliburton, your worries are over. McDonald passed creditably. Very creditably."

"Do I thank you or Regan?"

Seebert smiled.

"Clever man, that Regan," he said. "Did you hear about his faculty gym class? It's made me feel twenty years younger."

"He's my right-hand man," said Halliburton.

When Seebert was gone, the coach turned to White with a smile.

"I knew he'd put it over. How in the dickens does he do it?"

"Well, look! He takes old Seebert and makes him feel good and Seebert's sympathy and respect for athletics goes up to one hundred per cent. Oh, if Regan's one-tenth as good at cartooning as he is at getting around people, he'll be worth a million some day."

Regan was very willing to explain his system for "getting around" folks.

"Why, coach, a fellow that has been a gambler can always do it. Gamblers don't play the game, they play the man. You just size'm up and figure what he'll do and then you tackle'm along them lines."

V.

It was a dull, biting afternoon in November. The afternoon of the day before Thanksgiving. Halliburton's second Thanksgiving at Bearpike.

This time the coach wasn't in his office. He was in the office of the dean of the college and he was feeling as if the world had suddenly collided with another planet and had cracked to pieces.

He was sitting on a small wall chair, which was not built for the comfort of such frames as his. Beside him was Line Coach White and beyond was Kid Regan. They sat in a row, like three prisoners.

Opposite them was an old-fashioned rosewood desk which, as Regan had remarked, was almost big enough to make a fight platform. From across its littered table-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

top surface Dean Sterrett looked gravely, sunk down in his leatherbacked swivel chair in a judicial attitude.

At Sterrett's right, in another easy chair, was an ominously powerful figure at Bearpike; the elderly, Vandyke bearded gentleman who was known to everyone as Mr. Brooks. Brooks had endowed the school of arts and sciences and the school of engineering. He had built Brooks Hall, and had created some two hundred scholarships.

His endowments paid the salaries of two-thirds of the faculty, and his gifts to the alumni association helped pay the salaries of the coaches.

At the dean's left was a third member of the easy chair inquisition. His name was Lytle, and he was president of the Bearpike Alumni Association. He was stout, had a short mustache, and was young and oratorical looking.

The three on the safe side of the big desk were evidently in perfect agreement with one another. Things began to move according to a sort of program. Lytle led the batting order.

"Coach Halliburton, I will state the purpose of this meeting. After some discussion we decided to bring you here in an informal way, to present to you certain grave accusations which have been made against you, and which, seemingly, have been substantiated.

"We might have summoned you and your assistants before the advisory committee of the faculty to show cause why you should not be dismissed from the college, but we decided that a preliminary hearing was in order. A reading of the indictments, as it were."

Halliburton, of course, knew university types and faculty types, and he knew from the expressions worn by these three that high treason was in the air. Also, that he was considered the traitor. But the why of it was beyond him.

"For goodness' sake, what's wrong?" he asked nervously.

Lytle bowed gravely to Dean Sterrett.

"Perhaps, sir—"

"Ahem, yes." Dean Sterrett put his finger tips together and eyed Halliburton sternly. "Mr. Halliburton, until a few days ago we felt that your record here was marvelous. We were proud of you. Since mid-season last year our football team has been, to put it mildly, the sensation of our valley conference.

"It has played magnificently and cleanly. Its members have kept good standing in the class rooms. We could ask no more. But with last Saturday's disgraceful showing against State University our pride fell. We were shocked and wounded.

State is our school's old rival. We wanted to beat her. To fail, after having had such a marvelous season elsewhere, was more than painful. Even so, however, we were not inclined to criticize. Having the chances of the game in mind, we were more in the way of—"

"Just a minute!" It was a testy bark from Mr. Brooks. "He knows all this, I fancy. Let's be more definite."

The dean yielded with a nod.

Mr. Brooks is in full possession of the facts, Mr. Halliburton. He will present them.

Brooks leaned forward fiercely. Would he present them? Would he? There was no doubt of it.

Halliburton cringed. It was bad enough to have to talk about Bearpike's mysterious, unexplainable defeat by State at the end of a whirlwind, triumphant season. It would be worse to take a bawling out over it, and Brooks had bawling out written all over him.

"Halliburton, what I have to say can be said in a few words. The State game was played Saturday. On Sunday morning a prominent broker and member of our local stock exchange came to me and said that the game had been the basis of huge gambling operations on the exchange. Our unexpected and unforeseen defeat had caused tremendous losses to some of the members.

"I immediately investigated and found his complaint was true. My investigation led to the discovery of other facts, one by one, and now I imagine you will find it hard to explain all of them."

Halliburton had never taken part in a crooked deal in his life. He had never gam-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bled on football games. He lost no time in replying.

"Suppose you present your facts?"

Brooks bristled gleefully. You could see that he liked an argument.

"I am about to do so. Now in this matter of gambling, I found that heavy wagers had been placed on nearly all of our games since you came here. I can produce witnesses. Then I encountered rumors of professionalism.

"Men said our football players were paid large sums to join the team, and were given bonuses if they won a game. I have questioned members of the team, and two of them have admitted receiving such bonuses. And while securing that evidence I came upon an even worse thing.

"Mr. Halliburton, the faculty of an educational institution must be considered sacred. Its ethics must be perfect, its reputation unimpeachable, its integrity unquestioned. Yet hint and rumor gradually forced me to consider unescapable evidence that you had not stopped at gambling on our games, and that you had not stopped at packing our teams with professional players.

"You had actually gone to the fearful extreme of bribing members of our faculty. Of paying them large sums to give passing grades to football players. I couldn't believe it, sir. I couldn't, really, until this was given me."

Brooks waved a document in the air.

"Here is the signed confession of Professor Seebert, that he accepted five hundred dollars to pass fullback McDonald in mathematics last spring. He states he was given the money by Mr. Regan, who seems to have been your agent in all these contrivings.

"It was Regan who gambled on the stock exchange, we find. At least, it was he who placed the actual wagers, in person or through agents. It was he, again, who made arrangements for bonuses to players and who paid the expenses of the seventeen men who formed the backbone of this year's squad.

"And so, Mr. Halliburton, we charge that you, employing Mr. Regan and Mr. White as agents, have conspired to besmirch the fair name of Bearpike University athletics. We make the charge with good basis of facts and definite evidence, and we await your answer."

Brooks sat down and glared triumphantly. He let it be known that he felt he had done a rather beautiful job.

Halliburton was in turmoil. The words "signed confession" and "witnesses" whirled in his brain. He had a dim notion he might answer some time, but had no idea how to begin. Then he saw Regan step forward.

"Wait!" he gulped.

"Wait nothing!" snarled Regan.

The little prize fighter went belligerently to the edge of the rosewood desk and leaned over.

"You poor cheeses!" he said contemptuously. "Fer crying out loud, this is the worst I ever heard. Just when things is going right you big babies get nervous. Now—"

"Regan," said Halliburton, "let me talk!"

"Sit tight, coach, I'll set these lads straight."

"Proceed, Mr. Regan," said Brooks, with a malicious glance at Halliburton.

"Perceed is my name, Brooksy. I'm mad, I am. Here Hallie and White and me has turned out the first winning team you've had here in fifteen years, and you got the nerve to sit there and practically call us crooks. You'd ought to be ashamed. But there's no use of any of us crabbing any more. The thing to do is keep cool and talk it over sensible.

"Now, first, let's get clear on one thing. Hallie and White didn't have nothing to do with me at all. They're just regular fellows that give me a job so I could stay in school and learn cartooning. Anything I did, why I went ahead and did it and kept my mouth shut. I was just trying to help them and earn my salary.

"Now, what did I do? Well, I'll tell you straight and give you the low-down on every blame thing, and you'll soon see for yourselves there was nothing crooked about it from end to end. Men, I'm just a little too old to try to be crooked in sport. I learned long ago that it don't pay. It's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too dog-gone easy to get by on the square in athaletics, so why take chances? 'At's my idea."

Here he paused to smile conciliatingly. Brooks smiled and nodded.

"We're glad to hear that, Mr. Regan. Now give us the facts."

"Cer'nly, Brooksy, cer'nly. Uh—now—well, take them freshmen I got. I never paid them to come here—I just lent 'em the money. I took their notes for it regular, just like your Students' Loan Fund does. Is it my fault them notes caught fire and burned up one night? Not a bit of it.

"And who furnished that there money? Why, you did, Mr. Brooks. That is, you give it to your son which played poker with me ever' night last winter, and I won it off him. Well, what's wrong with that? Somebody's got to win at poker, and somebody's got to lose.

"And you needn't to worry, either, Brooksy, because the boy's got a good idea of the game now, and he's pretty near even with it again, winning off other kids in school here."

Lytle made a gulping sound that didn't quite dare to be a snicker. The dean wriggled. Old man Brooks gradually turned red until he looked like a bad case of sunburn. Regan didn't notice.

"Now, as to giving the boys bonuses after games. That's a dirty lie. Last year the team was dead from the ground up, and it couldn't of won nothing without a little sugar to pep it up, but I didn't give no bonuses. I just arranged to bet money for them and told them they could have it if they'd win. Is 'at criminal? Of course not. Ever'body likes to bet a little on a game.

"And then you jump on me and Hallie and say we bribed old man Seebert. Listen! That poor old boy was struggling along here for twenty-fi' hunderd a year fer fifteen years, and did any of you do anything fer him? No, baby! Not one jit did you slip him.

"Well, who did? I come along, and *I* did. He had some debts that was worrying him, and I paid them debts as one friend to another. Whose business was that? My own business, and nobody else's. I never give him no money when he passed McDonald. It was a week before. So you're clear wrong there."

"Now, last of all, let's look at this State game. That's no more than a clean, out and out business proposition. We went into that game on the long end of ten-to-one odds. Now, you are all grown up men, and you know and I know that there's no profit in betting ten to one.

"When there's a long shot like that, the only play in the world is to take the short end and make it come through. Figures like that is juicy, but you got to get on the little side. Well, that's all I did. I just put my watch and chain and shoes and suspender buttons on State, and give our boys their orders to lose. What else was there to do?

"What if I did pretty near break that stock exchange you're talking about, Brooksy? And what if I did take a little off some of you fellows? You don't want to cry about that. I couldn't hold no public meeting and say what was my platform, and it's all to your good in the end.

"I'm a loyal Bearpike man, and I'm looking to the future. Things may not seem so rich to you now, after losing on the game and all, but there's pie coming for all of us. We want to play big games here, don't we? Well, to do that we gotta have a stadium. You know we do. Well, I cleaned up a hunderd thousand on that game, and I'm gonna give half to start a stadium fund. Here's my check, which I wrote yesterday, intending to bring it up this morning.

"*Now* do y' get the idea? The big stuff is only beginning. We got a first-class proposition working here. The thing to do is for us all to get behind it. We can all play our bets together, and we can clean up a mint. Hell's fire, boys, we'll have us a stadium built in no time, and I guess things won't be cushy then?

"A hunderd thousand people sitting out there at two to five dollars a head, and us getting a nice little cut on the gate. Wake up, gents—wake up and get wise! The fireworks is just beginning."

It was needless to tell them to wake up. For the only time in the history of Bear-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pike; probably, any one looking in the window of the dean's office could have seen five men, prominent in the college world, sitting with their mouths open, staring at a little bent-nosed, thick-eared prize fighter. Spellbound—dumfounded—paralyzed! The little prize fighter took it for admiration.

"So for goodness' sake now," he admonished them, "don't go and spill the beans. Don't have no row about it and get everybody talking about how old man Brooks's son put up the stake and all and how I lent old man Seebert money—and he ain't the only prof that I loaned them money either. Don't do it, or the first thing you know the darn fool newspapers will get to jabbering about it and tip our hand to the whole country.

"Ever'thing is legitimate, as I say, but it wouldn't be no time at all until all the other colleges caught on and would be doing the same thing, and we'd be frozen out.

Regan sat down, smiling proudly. Halliburton watched the three inquisitors. They looked straight ahead, through the wall and into vistas of the future.

They didn't see what Regan saw, but they saw plenty. They breathed heavily.

Lytle finally broke the silence. He leaned over and spoke from the corner of his mouth, like a convict.

"Brooks, he's got us!" was the whisper.

The dean put his finger tips together and said nothing. After four minutes he nodded slowly in the affirmative. Brooks made a sudden gesture.

"By thunder—" Nothing followed.

Halliburton arose.

"Gentlemen," he said smoothly, "I think Mr. Regan's statement clears me. I also think I can guarantee to straighten out certain misunderstandings which he seems to have regarding out ambitions and tactics. And I do think we would do well to take his advice. I wouldn't willingly have had the present situation arise, but since it has arisen I think careful silence is the only policy open to us."

Brooks banged his fist heavily upon the table.

"Meetin' 'journed!" he said thickly. "Take no action for present. Lay matter on table."

"Say, boys," cried Regan, who put his own interpretation on the state of affairs, "as long as I'm givin' fifty thousand smackers couldn't you call it Regan Field?"

THE END

THE VILLAGE BAND

THE village bandstand is forlorn and deserted,
The village brass band has been put on the skids,
And where we gathered, our troubles averted,
There are but spiders and sparrows and kids;
The baker and butcher, the barber and plumber
Are no longer doing their musical stuff;
The trombone is silent, the bass drum is dumber,
The brasses and woods are as dead as Macduff.

The village bandstand that we thought so appealing,
The village brass band that we figured was there,
When through the twilight its voices came stealing,
Have both been given the laugh and the air;
The blacksmith, the grocer, the crossing gate-tender,
Who was the leader, have staged their last show,
For we are enjoying real musical splendor,
And there's nothing beating our town's radio.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Devil's Saddle

By KENNETH PERKINS

Author of "Horsemen Against the Moon," "The Starlit Trail," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PREVIOUS PARTS

HARRY MORREL, hellbending son of stern old "Chief" Morrel, ruler of Neutral Saddle, is wounded by "Gentle" Ladley, most despicable gunman in the West, at the ranch of Concha, the saintly witch doctor of the Big Mesas. When Concha convinces Harry that the last two men Ladley is blamed for killing really were shot by the Chief, his father, Harry starts off, wounded, to destroy an old calico pony with the Morrel brand on it, the only evidence against the Chief. In dispatching the pony, Harry inadvertently kills its rider, a Papago Indian, who is stealing it. Harry then cuts the brand off the carcass. Three prospectors, who find Harry, accuse him of the wanton murder of the Papago, and hold him captive at a sheep ranch, while they notify his father. With Moran, his chief deputy, and Larabee, owner of the Bar-L Ranch, the Chief starts for the sheep ranch to try—and probably to hang—his own son!

CHAPTER XVII.

AWAITING DEATH.

THE sheep ranch was situated in a deep box cañon called Trade Rat Gulch. A single old half-breed lived there, and on account of his habit of selling water to passing prospectors for a can of tomatoes or soup he had gained a rather bad name among the muckers of Borax Desert.

Aside from that one little flaw in his character he was a very estimable man. Something of a hermit, something of a religious fanatic, he was not entirely a bad sort of citizen in a desert country where rustlers abound, and where, as the saying goes, "the calf is not safe in the mother cow."

It was at the dead of night that a tall, gaunt, wounded man was brought to his ranch in the custody of two white-haired

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 30.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prospectors. The men wanted water for themselves and for their horses, and the flat-nosed, high-cheekboned old breed demurred, suggesting the fact that water had to be toted by mules over a very rough bit of trail, and that he was constantly drained of his supply by passing white gentlemen who had much gold dust.

If, however, the three could understand his position, and make it worth the necessary trip next day with his hide-covered five-gallon cans—

"Speakin' of cans," Simpson the younger interrupted, "we'd admire to have you can them thar suggestions. This outfit ain't payin' for water. We're workin' in the interests of the law. When Chief Morrel comes, you kin dicker with him."

Chief Morrel! Coming to his ranch! The interests of law! Well, that was different. Would the white gentlemen like tamales and cueve and a chuck of beef with coffee?

No, they had eaten their fill a short while before up at Concha's ranch.

"But have breakfast ready for us in the mornin'," Simpson the elder stipulated. "We'll be stoppin' here for a day or two. Our pard, Grannas, is huntin' the sheriff, which he's in the cañons yonder trailin' a outlaw, and we expect him to drop by here sooner or later."

The breed stared out of muddy, tight slits of eyes. He did not like the looks of his three guests—particularly the tall, young one. The fact that the latter was wounded did not in any manner allay the host's fears.

"You got a bunk ready so's this here hombre kin lay down?" Simpson the elder asked. "You kin see he's got a crease in the shoulder, which a little sleep won't do him no hurt."

The half-breed lit a jack lantern, and ushered the three men to a bunk shed in the rear of his main ranch house.

"I'll set here, stayin' on watch till mornin'," the elder said to his brother. "You kin sleep till then."

Simpson the younger was shown another small bunk room in the same long, low shack. The breed went on to the next door with Simpson the younger.

"The young hombre in there," the host said in a low and apprehensive voice, "ees bad hombre?"

"I reckon that's a good way to describe him," said the other.

"What crime, señor, ees this hombre commit?"

"Killed a Injun—back thar on the south slope."

"H'm. Sheriff Morrel, he will hang him pronto, I think so."

"Pronto's the word. Except that this here hellbender is his own son."

"Sangre de Cristo!" the Mexican exclaimed.

"And in order that you won't git too friendly or sympathetic with the young gun-fanner, I'd admire to have you understand just why he's our prisoner. He throwed a Injun over a cliff. Some sort of a quarrel. His only reason is that the victim was a breed. He's given that thar identical reason before—"

"Ah, I remember, señor!" the host said. "The prospectors which pass by thees cañon have tol' me. The sheriff's son, he mak' big fight in Pedro's bar. Shoot up everybody very moch. The sheriff mak' the trial in Neutral Saddle—and send his son to the calabozo!"

"That's the facts of the case, Mr. Breed. And we're expectin' another trial—along the same lines. What he'll do this time remains to be seen."

"Madre de Dios, ees a terrible mix-up, I think so!"

"And I'm warnin' you to stay away from that bunk room. If that young hellbender ever gits a gun in his hand, the first one of us he'll plug will be you, because you've got high cheek bones and a brown face. That's all the provocation he needs."

"Por Dios! I stay away for my life!" the half-breed avowed.

"Wake me in the morning at sunrise," said the guest. "And I'll have my eggs done on both sides."

The next day an air of peace and calm resignation settled over Trade Rat Gulch. At least that was the state of mind of three of its inhabitants—the prisoner and his two old captors.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

As for the host, the word resignation applies, but the word calm does not. His guests were eating him out of house and home. They ate a big enough breakfast for seven men, and they seemed to insist on their stove-up plugs drinking water as if they were human beings. Only they drank enough to water a whole army of men and mules.

Toward sunset the old breed was pestered by two more guests. They sneaked down from somewhere in the Big Mesa fastnesses as ravenous as wolves, as thirsty as steers, and added to that they were ill-tempered and looking for trouble.

Fortunately they were not a very dangerous-looking pair, merely a Papago Indian, very old, very tall, and with a face like leather that has been badly tanned. The skin was less like a human being's than like the splotchy black and red of a Gila monster.

It was impossible to guess within half a century of the Indian's age, but it was certain he was over eighty. He entered upon the scene like some character resurrected from past ages, a savage, sinister ghost.

With him was a tremendous lummox of a squaw.

The squaw could only speak a word or two of Arizona English, but her companion—who, it appeared later, was her grand-uncle—acted as spokesman for the pair, and delivered his message, which was very disagreeable:

An Indian riding in the desert had found a member of their tribe—this squaw's brother, in fact—lying at the base of a cliff in a gulch on the south slopes of the range. The squaw and her aged relative had come to the gulch in time to chase off a coyote. Their kinsman, in short, was dead.

The bones and hide of his horse were lying near by, pretty well cleaned by coyotes and buzzards. But they had been able to tell by examining the torn strips of hide that a bullet had been put into the critter.

The old Papago herald-priest did not explain why it was he examined that carcass so carefully. But the fact was both he and the squaw were well aware of their young kinsman's horse-stealing proclivities, and they wished to satisfy themselves just what brand that horse carried. It might explain the mystery.

There was, needless to say, no brand to be found on those bloody strips of calico hide. For this reason the aged Indian and the squaw surmised that their kinsman had not been engaged in horse thievery, but had been murdered through some treachery of an unknown enemy.

They spent the night in tracking down clews, but because of the fine silica of the gulch bed and the pebbly trails threading the breaks of the gulch they had not been able to find any definite tracks. Their search did not lead them to Concha's ranch, although they did ride around the rim of the gulch hunting for tracks of a possible rider. A wind high up there on the rim had obliterated the clearer tracks, and such of those as were left were not easily found at night time.

They arrived finally at the logical conclusion that they better report the whole business to the big white chief, Sheriff Morrel.

Thus it was that in taking the trail which crosses Borax Desert they fell in with a rider who was going on the same errand—in search of the sheriff. It was Grannas.

Grannas told them the whole story—that is to say, he told them as much as he knew of it. Their kinsman, he said sympathetically, had been murdered for no other reason than that he was a Papago. The slayer had confessed his motive in those very words.

And who was the slayer—and where was he?

He was at the sheep ranch in Trade Rat Gulch, held prisoner by the two Simpson brothers.

And his name was Harry Morrel.

"Son of big white chief!" the aged Indian exclaimed, without changing any muscle in his deeply corrugated face. "Heap bad hombre. Fight peaceful Indian and breed many years. Hy-yu-skookum. Papagoes go on warpath."

"Don't go talkin' any war talk to me,"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Grannas had said. "Or I'll start a little war myself right here. You two shag back to that thar rancho and wait. I'm goin' to git the sheriff."

That was a good enough suggestion. The old Indian was too feeble to ride across the desert after the nerve racking trailing he had just engaged in. And his grand-niece was too heavy a load for an ordinary plug.

"We trail to Trade Rat barranca," he said. "Our cayuses heap thirsty. Squaw heap hungry. She is plum cultus nuisance on trail. We wait. If Big Chief Morrel don't come, good, I kill 'im son of chief. And my kinsmen at Pueblo scalp all white muckers in desert."

With this threat he rode back to Trade Rat Gulch, taking the squaw with him. Her calf-kneed little cayuse followed in the wake of the old Papago, bearing its mountain of weight like a pack horse laden with a far too heavy outfit of food, grain, water, and mining tools.

On arriving at the sheep ranch, the old Papago repeated the same sentiments he had voiced to Grannas. There would be war. Phineas Morrel was the father of the plum cultus Gila monster, and he would not render justice. He would delay, he would palaver, he would make excuses, he would give his son a horse and six-shooter and water, and let him escape to Mexico.

The little breed posadero reported the arrival of these two unwelcome characters to his other guests.

Harry Morrel and the two prospectors were playing poker on a barrel.

The Simpson brothers were very much alarmed.

"You better git into that thar bunk shed agin, Harry," they said to their prisoner. "The ole Injun's liable to take his own revenge."

But the breed pointed out that there was no danger of this. The ninety or hundred year old redskin had left his sawed-off shotgun slung over his saddle, according to the host's stipulation.

Besides, he was too old to shoot it off anyway. The only menace he had to offer was his promise to get his whole tribe behind him unless justice was rendered.

"How about the squaw?" Simpson the elder asked. "They're the ones you have to look out for when they's revenge at stake."

The squaw would not fight, the breed assured them. She would wait, hoping that, according to the Papago system, the white chief would turn the condemned prisoner over to her for a treatment of burning splinters.

"Tell 'em my dad will be here sooner or later," the prisoner said. "And he'll give 'em justice gladly. But if they say anything more about going on the warpath he'll collect all the lassos on the range, and the whole damn tribe will find themselves hanging in a row with the crows chawing their ears."

"I'll tell them, señor," the posadero said gratefully.

"And how about supper?" Harry asked.

"Supper, *por Dios!* Supper for you three, which eat more than the horse! And for two Papago Indians besides! *Madre de Dios,* but the justice she are a very expensive commodity!"

"Go ahead, deal the cards, Stew," Harry said.

Hours passed. There were more meals, more sessions of poker, more long sleep. It was a strange household gathered together there with the half-breed at the Trade Rat sheep ranch: an old Indian clamoring for revenge, a fat squaw, biding her time, eating like a horse, sleeping; two white-headed prospectors never without their guns; and finally, a prisoner who slept the most peacefully of all, the sleep of utter physical exhaustion, his soul at peace with the whole world, and the whole of mankind.

And during those dreadful hours the little breed kept scurrying around from one shed to the other; from his main ranch house to the bunk house, then to the chuck house, and the store shed.

Justice was more than expensive; it was disastrous. If the Chief would only come and put an end to this nightmare existence. The breed could not sleep a wink. He was afraid to sleep. He was afraid of being awakened by a gun fight, and finding his house torn down around his ears.

The best he could do was to spend hours at prayer, beseeching the stern but all mer-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ciful *Dios* to put some sort of end to his misery. With a lighted candle before him, and a dog-eared Spanish Bible, he read hours at a time, while the whir of cards and the jingle of silver on the barrel in the next room, kept up a dismal obligato to his worship.

He was afraid to take his eyes off the barn where he had permitted the old Papago and the squaw to sleep. They would sneak over to the store shed and steal some more food. There seemed to be no bottom to that squaw's stomach. She would eat a can of vegetables, thrusting her hands into it like a bear.

And he was afraid to leave that shed where the poker players were installed. The two old men guarding the murderer were entirely too lax in their vigil. He might surprise them when one of them was gathering in a big pot, get their guns, then go out and murder those two Indians, and everybody else. The breed would not be immune.

In a word, he was like the man who had a fox, and a goose, and a bag of grain, and found himself confronted with the problem of crossing a river. He could take one of his possessions at a time, but if he took the fox the goose would eat the grain. If he took the grain the fox would eat the goose.

Thus, if the breed didn't watch the feed-shack and corral, those thieving Indians would make away with something. If he didn't watch Harry Morrel, that gun-shooter would kill the thieving Indians, not to mention the breed.

It was during this state of affairs that, at three o'clock one cool moonlit night, the sound of horses' hoofs came beating rhythmically upon the rock slabs of the gulch bed.

To the distracted breed it came as the gentle sound of rain to a thirst-tortured steer.

To Harry Morrel it came with a somewhat fearful significance.

The rhythm gripped his body. It had a vital message, which he felt beating in his very pulse, as the rhythm of tomtoms in a jungle may transmit some message of devils and death to a lonely savage.

He held a good hand that round, drawing a deuce to jacks and deuces. It had been a jackpot sweetened several times.

He laid the hand down, for his two captors had arisen.

"I guess the game's over, Harry," Simpson the elder said quietly.

They all knew that the judge had come.

Harry Morrel knew it first, for his ears were the keenest, and he could pick out the particular rhythm of that big blood bay his father rode. Under those circumstances he could have picked it out from a herd.

Harry closed the small fan of cards he held in his hands; then tossed them in the discard.

He went out with old Swig Simpson to the corral, Simpson the younger following behind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE BREAKING POINT.

FATHER and son met out under the gleam of moonlight in the ramshakle corral. All that could be seen of their faces as they looked at each other were the two jaws under the jet black shadows of the sombrero brims.

But that was enough. They were two jaws exactly alike, both adamantine, unyielding.

Old Phineas Morrel saw that his son had no fear of him. But the engaging grin that ordinarily was there had forsaken the hard lips of the youth. He seemed old.

There were lines, which his ride into the fierce heat of the barranca south of Concha's ranch had deepened in his face, making him look as old as Phineas himself. There was nothing in that countenance inviting the father's sympathy. It was resolute, challenging.

And that same sternness—and pain—was reflected in the father's face, as if it had been reflected in a perfect mirror.

"You did what you said you'd do," was the chief's greeting. He referred to Harry's parting words with him in the desert when he had promised to raise hell. "You've raised hell once too often."

Harry did not answer this. As a matter of fact, he had no answer. He had no state-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment to make of any kind. What his father had to do must be done—and Harry would not prevent it.

The two deputies who had ridden into the gulch with Phineas—the stalwart, bearded Larabee, and the little man with the walrus mustache, stood behind the chief, waiting for his orders.

A moment of indecision seemed to have weakened the old man. He was waiting, with the fervent hope that his son would speak. But it was very apparent to every one that Harry was going to leave the whole ceremony up to his father.

Behind the two deputies was the spikey-bearded Grannas, talking to the elder Simpson. Simpson the younger was behind Harry. And a little behind him were two furtive, slinking men, deep in a massive shadow. The massive shadow was cast over them by the shapeless bulk of blanket and fat—the squaw.

"Who are them hombres?" the chief asked. "And that thar squaw?"

"The little breed is the sheepherder who owns this joint," Simpson the younger said. "The two injuns is relatives of the deceased."

"Relatives of which?"

"Of the Papago which Harry dumped."

The sheriff straightened up. But it was not an indication that he had taken on strength. It was rather the opposite. The news took him by surprise. He did not know that the trial of his son, which he had hoped would be a very secret affair out here in the bad lands, would be intensified by the presence of unwelcome witnesses.

"Take 'em into the main shack," the chief said. "I want to talk to 'em there." He then turned to the shrinking breed.

"You say this button owns the joint? All right, then, breed; see to it that our nags are watered."

The breed bowed humbly. Phineas Morrel was the savior who had come to put an end to his hours of misery.

"I am Miguel Hidalgo, *señor*," he said, rubbing his brown little hands. "I am sheepherder by grace of God in thees cañon. For long time I feed everybody tamales, chicken, canned milk, water—which are very precious—"

"Well, I don't want none of your water," the chief interrupted. "I want a good slug of liquor, which same I'd admire to have you serve up in a hurry."

He turned to his two deputies. "Larabee, and you, too, Moran, stay out here with the boy. I'll call you directly." He then went into the ranch house with the rest of the company.

The main room was a low-ceilinged hall with a kitchen table, and barrel or two, and a long bench. Saddles, old bridles, riatas, saw-bucks, littered the place. A single smoky lantern offered the only light except for the band of moonbeams filtering through the cobwebs of a window.

The chief sat down at the table, and the others stood, waiting respectfully for him to have his necessary drink.

He took the bottle from the servile half-breed, pouring out a stiff swig in a tin cup. Then he passed the bottle to the man standing nearest him, Simpson the elder. It passed through all hands, and was finally drained by one who could outdrink both the junior and senior Morrel in their palmiest days. I mean the aged Papago.

He belched loudly, then stood, his coarse, sun-bleached hair falling in tangled strands across red eyes. His head nodded in palsy as he glowered at the man sitting at the table.

"How the hell did this seedwart happen to show up?" the chief asked.

Grannas explained how he had met the old fellow and the squaw on the trail in search of the chief.

"I come for justice, Big Chief Sheriff!" the Papago said.

"Well, who said you weren't goin' to get it?" Phineas roared angrily. "That's the old story with you Injuns. Always howlin' around me for justice, and you always get same, don't you? And you'll get it this time, even if my son was at fault." He turned to the squaw. "What-alls inside this blanket?"

"She's the Injun's sister. I mean the Injun Harry croaked," said Simpson the elder. "Been hangin' around here ever since she first found out we'd took Harry prisoner. She's give' us all nervous prostration.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Never said nothin'. Just watched us out'n the corner of her eyes while we was playin' poker. Every couple hours she'd go and eat a chuck of beef and a laig of lamb, sleep off the effects, then come back and watch Harry out'n the corner of her eyes some more."

The sheriff was evidently very much displeased with the presence of both of these desert characters. It brought all the issues of that trial to a very disagreeable head.

He looked again at the tall Indian, whose shaking parchment hands were fumbling with a tattered felt hat. "Now, then, you," the judge said. "I suppose you figure that bein' I'm the sheriff of this here country, and that the prisoner out thar is my own son, you're goin' to be cheated of what you want—which is his life?"

"Big Chief Sheriff is just chief," the Indian said. "Papagoes trust Big Chief Sheriff. For many years he right 'im wrongs. Heap good man. Our Papago chieftain always punish his sons for crime. White man do so—some time. This time I think so."

"And if you get cheated of the revenge you're hankerin' for," the old judge said caustically, "I suppose you'll go back to your tribe and get 'em all het up so's no white man prospectin' in this here desert will be safe from now on?"

The tall savage shook his matted hair. "You no cheat poor Papago of revenge."

"As a matter of honest-to-God fact, chief," Grannas put in at a rather delicate moment, "this sore-eyed coyote made that thar very same statement to me. He'll git his tribe worked up, all righto. That's one reason I wanted to be sure you straightened this business out agreeable-like to all concerned."

The judge put up a hand in interruption. He was going to straighten it out. He always straightened such things out. He would follow the business through step by step with an inexorable and merciless logic.

But there was one point he wanted these Indians to understand. He looked up at them scowling. They were disarmed, helpless waifs of the desert, but they symbolized a very fatal danger. Blood had been shed. The horde of desert Indians, the tribesmen, would shed much blood in just reprisal.

"You coyote-livered Injuns," he said, "have an ornery habit of mixin' up the word revenge with justice. If my son killed your kinsman in some just cause, and I declared him not guilty, would you still be hankerin' for blood?"

"Big Chief's son did not kill in just cause," the gaunt old shaman said.

"That's what we're here to find out," the other shot back, indulging the ancient, palsied man his misuse of logic. "I said 'if,' and you disregard that thar little word. Well, I ain't disregardin' it.

"I think they's an 'if' to this business. I never blew around any too loud about my son's good points, because I don't think he's got any. But still and all I got a sort of feelin' in my ole bones that he ain't guilty of this thing. And that feelin' ain't just rheumatism, either."

"In that case, chief," Simpson the elder said, "might we've made a mistake in takin' your son into custody?"

"If he's innocent," the aged Papago said in a cracked but proud voice, "I, Bill Gopher, seek no revenge for death of Tom Gopher, my kinsman. I am old herald-priest. Heap old. I dream only of happy hunting grounds, and of burial fire. Soon my face, paint 'im red, and my tribesmen will turn my face to west. What does Bill Gopher care for revenge on white youth?"

"Well, I take that as a bona fide speech, Mr. Gopher," the judge said. "If my son killed your kinsman in a just cause, you will forget?"

The matted white hair nodded, and kept nodding in a lesser degree in palsy for the rest of the ceremony.

"But how about that thing in the blanket over there?" the sheriff said, indicating the huge squaw. "Is she thinkin' of goin' soon to the happy hunting grounds, too? 'Pears to me like she's still pretty healthy."

"Explain to her, hombre, what the judge said," Simpson the elder commanded. "They's to be no feud between us whites and you Papagos from Borax River. After this trial, if Harry is innocent, he goes free. If he's guilty, he pays the just penalty."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The old Indian interpreted these sentiments to the squaw. She listened attentively without any change in her fat, round countenance except the habitual sniffle. Finally she made some reply.

"Interpret what she says to us, hombre."

"She say big chief is just man."

"We know that," the big chief remarked laconically.

"She say his son is plum cultus."

"We know that likewise. Tell us if she said yes or no to our question. We ain't interested in no Injun compliments."

"She says her brother who is dead was heap good Papago. Support his old sister. Now he is dead Papago, she have no food to fill belly, except cornmeal doughnuts and piki bread."

"If my son killed her means of support, whether in the right or wrong, I'll make it good."

The Indian repeated this news, and it brought a slight change of countenance on the redwood features of the squaw.

"She says she will forget," the interpreter divulged, "if the white chief hang bad hombre." He added in a more deferential tone: "If white son innocent, she like 'im gift of friendship."

The judge squinted an eye. These desert Indians very often took advantage of the fact that he was a rich and generous man. But he had no time now for puny bargains. He was bargaining with a far higher power than two sore-eyed Indians. He was bargaining with fate for the life of his son.

"You say the murdered man supported her? What was his business?"

"Horse trader."

The judge stroked his jaw. "I see."

He looked up at the two Simpsons, at Grannas, at the breed posadero. "Horse trader! Blooey!" Without another word to the two plaintiffs he took the empty red-eye bottle and knocked on the table—a gesture which he customarily employed to call his court to order.

Every one in the hot little room stiffened to attention. Time enough had been wasted, the chief had given them to understand by that one rap.

"Go and call the prisoner in here," he said in a changed voice.

Grannas turned to the door, and three men came in response to his call. The wounded prisoner, with a tall, bearded man on one side of him, on the other the little deputy with the walrus mustache.

Swig Moran seemed frightened at the imminence of tragedy that hung over that dreadful little room. The man with the knotted beard was frowning with a set, savage scowl. He was one man, being a big ranch owner, who wanted uncompromising justice.

The prisoner had changed somewhat in those few moments. All evidence of his nonchalance and exuberance was gone. He could plainly see that he was in a bad fix. And he could not help reacting to it. A man in full possession of his senses can't just laugh at a promise of death.

He could laugh when he believed it problematical. He could revel in his own innocence. But as the scene approached its climax Harry's innocence was no longer of sufficient importance to enthuse him. It had dwindled to something ridiculous, something pitiful.

"I want to make a statement to all you folks in here," the judge began in a tone of resolution that was clearly forced. "This here little shack is holdin' just the folks which are concerned with this affair. These here desert Injuns are the plaintiffs. They belong here.

"You three muckers who took my son into custody, you're witnesses, and you belong here likewise. Larabee is my deputy, and he kind of represents all the ranchers in this country who've been able to make their livin' because of peace bein' kept on the range.

"Swig Moran, he's my chief deputy, and bein' he's the only one of this gang who ever had any sympathy with the hell-bustin' my son has done ever since he has been big enough to straddle a cayuse, why, I'm glad he's here too, to see that justice takes its course."

This included the whole company except the half-breed posadero. But as the house belonged to him, he was suffered to remain, but treated as if he did not exist.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now, the statement I want to make to you folks is just this: I'm set up to judge this here boy. I've been set up to judge my fellow man for nigh onto forty years. It's a long time—and in that time I've condemned a lot of poor unfortunate hombres, lynched same, and no man ever questioned my right. No man, I aim to make clear to you-all, exceptin' only one. That one is myself."

The little company stood in silence as the judge was making these preliminary remarks. Larabee nodded his grizzled head, agreeing with everything the old sheriff announced.

The old Papago nodded his head perpetually and gently in palsy. The squaw was immovable, mountainous, as solid and lifeless as if carved out of a giant redwood trunk. The only life in her was the quivering of flat nostrils as she sniffed—like something back in the shadows of a cave sniffing at a tempting bit of meat.

The judge was going on in a forcibly modulated voice: "Whenever I lynched some cattle thief, I would go home, feelin' a dead weight on my chest, like I'd committed a crime. Who was I to judge my fellow man? A cattle thief was built in my image—ain't I right?"

"Hell, no, chief—you're stretchin' a point there!" the bearded giant Larabee objected.

"Now, wait—wait till I finish. I mean that under the skin we're all brothers, as you might say—all alike. Am I better than any one else? Ain't I got the same weakness, passions, affections, hate, hunger?"

"Yes, but you've bridled 'em," Grannas said.

"Not always. They's times when they won't be bridled, like some of these outlaw stallions my puncher boys have rounded up and tried to bust. I've been throwed, as you might say—not often, but wunst in awhile, by some hell-divin' bucker of a passion—"

"Not that we know of, chief," Simpson the younger said ingratiatingly.

"And when a prisoner is brought to me that ain't quite able to set in the saddle because of some specially ornery bronc which he was told to ride, why, I say to myself, 'I hang this man for law and order; an' yet it's because I kin ride a hoss better 'n he that it ain't goin' to be me swingin' up in the wind to dry.'"

The chief thought that there was no one in that room who could understand the underlying meaning of his words. They were merely a few perfunctory sentences which any judge might make to a court for the sake of creating an impressive atmosphere—necessary to passing the sentence of death.

But there was one man who understood what he was saying. That was the prisoner. The father who had but recently killed two men was trying his son for killing a renegade "horse trader" of an Indian.

The knowledge of the devastating conflict that was taking place in the old war horse of a pioneer struck a chord of intense sympathy in Harry's breast. The man who was suffering most in that room was not Harry Morrel. It was old Phineas Morrel—and Harry knew it.

"I said whenever I sentenced a horse thief or killer in the past I felt like I was sentencin' my own flesh and blood," the judge went on. "Think what I'm feelin' now—sentencin' this boy—"

"It's all right, chief. Forget that," the stern, iron-willed Larabee interrupted. "You've disowned him. He's disowned you. He's bucked you for years. You're the ruler of this here range—exceptin' for him. Remember these here Injuns. Their flesh and blood was destroyed, weren't it?"

This irrefutable bit of logic took its toll. The old man sitting at the table reached for the empty bottle—and tapped the table with it uncertainly. He was dry, burning with a thirst inside. His piercing eagle eyes glanced up at the giant Larabee as if in a helpless sort of fury.

"You don't need to remind me, Larabee. Justice is what all you men want. I know justice. You know I know it."

"But if you're falterin'—if you're too soft-hearted to do the same to this boy as you've done many a time in the past—leave us pass judgment on him. Swig and me and these muckers.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You've always tried and hanged a man right out there in the desert. Totin' him to a trial outside never works here on the frontier; every one knows that. And a trial ain't goin' to help him anyways. It 'll make everybody talk, sayin' that you couldn't go through with it."

"I'll ask your opinion of my justice when this here trial is finished, Larabee," the judge said, whitening with anger. "Until then I don't want to hear no more argurin' from you. This ain't a Injun palaver. It's a trial. It's the same trial I've been holdin' for many years past. It's a sinful man judgin' his flesh and blood for sin."

"That's right," Swig said. "Don't nobody argur while the chief's talkin'. He'll manage this right. And we'll take a chanst on the sins you've committed, chief."

"Big Chief Sheriff make 'im delay," the Papago said, nodding excitedly. "Who cares if Big Chief Sheriff is guilty? Who has found him out? No one? But his son heap guilty. His son must be hanged."

"Who the hell asked you to talk?" little Swig broke in, thrusting his mustache up toward the herald-priest.

But the chief stopped this by-play. Now that he had unburdened himself, he seemed infinitely weary of it all—of the word justice, of the whole world and its miseries. He questioned his son in an exhausted, colorless voice:

"You're charged with killing a Papago Injun in a cowardly way. He was found at the base of a cliff—dyin' and all smashed up. And to these-here muckers he said that you'd throwed him down that cliff. Just what was the circumstances?"

"There weren't any," Harry Morrel replied firmly. Since his father's speech he was adamantine in his resolve now to protect the tragic and broken old man.

"What I mean is, how come a man and a horse was found at the base of a cliff? How did you throw 'em over? I kin understand your shovin' a Injun over—but how about that horse?"

Harry turned color somewhat at this. Did his father suspect?

But before he could make up his mind to answer, the Papago interrupted.

"He shoot 'im cayuse. Not the man. We find 'im carcass of cayuse. Hole in hide—make 'im bullet."

"Is that true?" the judge asked, facing the prisoner.

"I reckon so."

"You shot the horse—and it rolled over the cliff edge, takin' its rider?"

"That's what happened," Harry said.

The chief thought a moment, then came out abruptly with the question, the answer to which he hoped would set his son free. Whatever his son said would be believed. The only refutation possible would have to come from a renegade Indian—a dead Indian at that. Harry could say anything he wanted, and his father would make every one believe.

"What defense have you to make for to clear yourself from this cowardly act?"

"Nothing that will clear me," Harry said quietly.

The father pierced him with his savage eagle eyes.

"What motive did you have, son? Tell us that," he asked in a trembling voice.

"He told us his motive already, chief," Simpson the younger interrupted respectfully. "We found Harry wounded and lyin' in a daze near by. The first thing we axed him was that same question you're asking now. And he didn't have no time to think up any story either."

"He just blurted out, as he come outen his daze," Grannas added, "that he killed the man because he was a Injun."

The palsied old Indian shook with excitement. "It is enough. Plumb cultus white man kill my kinsman. I am Injun—my tribesmen are Injuns. We go on warpath, unless I take 'im scalp back to pueblo."

"Somebody 'll be takin' your scalp out to the coyote," Swig Moran said, his mustache twitching in rage.

"Is that your only defense, son?" the judge asked finally. "How come you can't tell us more? What started it? Did the Injun have a gun? Was he shootin' at you?"

"He was," Harry said. There was no need to hide this. But he could not explain that the Indian was shooting at him,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prompted by a guilty conscience because of that rustled horse. The horse must not be mentioned.

"Just why was he shootin' at you?" the father asked eagerly.

"We had a scrap."

"What about?"

Harry thought a moment. The stern-faced Larabee grew restless. It was quite obvious that the old chief wanted to find some loophole to crawl out of.

Harry was thinking fast. Perhaps he could cook up some tale about the Indian frightening the girl up on the mesa top. No, that would not do. The chief would call a halt to the whole proceedings and ride up to the girl's cabin, which was not very far away. She would tell the whole truth—in order to save Harry.

Perhaps he could say that the Indian was a thief. For instance, why not accuse him of stealing some canned goods from Harry's pack? That in itself was not enough to shoot a man for, but it would give a motive for a quarrel.

But Harry reflected in time: they would want to know what happened to the stolen goods. The sheriff would ride to the scene of the crime. They would all see the horse's hide. The sheriff would recognize it. He would confess in order to save his son.

"I can make up excuses," Harry said. "But none of you will believe. Any of you would take the word of a Papago Indian above mine. I'll say no more. My original story is good enough.

"They're all thieves and cowards. We quarreled. He threw on me. I went for my rifle and trailed him. I told you why I killed him; because he was a Injun. That's the only story you'll believe."

"Well, we all believe that," Larabee said, fingering his grizzled beard, "judgin' from your past reputation."

Simpson the younger, peering like an excited terrier at the gaunt prisoner, cried impatiently: "It's from his own lips, chief. He's condemned himself. What's the use of any more of this palaverin'?"

The chief could not help but realize the truth of this statement. Palavering would not rectify a great wrong. A peroration from the lips of a father will not expiate the sins of his son. Old Morrel looked at the prisoner with a look of infinite pity, defeat, pain. His blood was bad blood.

Miguel, the wisp of a half-breed, had read certain words in his dog-eared Bible but a few hours before, and he thought of them now that he saw the old sheriff's face: "Like as a father pitieth his children—"

"My son, after all," the chief was saying to himself, whispering half audibly as if unable to stiffen his lips. "After all, he is bad." And up until now Phineas Morrel had been firm in his conviction that his son must have been in the right.

"Are you goin' to let it go at that, son?" he asked.

"It's my last card, chief. I'll let it go at that."

"You know what it means?"

"I know what it means to you. I can take my medicine. I reckon you can take yours. You always said I'd hang. That means you win."

The father put up a trembling fist. "Don't make it harder than it is, by the Eternal. Don't taunt me now! Pray for your soul—don't laugh at God! You're a murderer—and by your face it looks kind of like you're gloryin' in it."

"Yes, damn you all, I am gloryin' in it!" the youth cried hotly.

The bearded old Larabee stepped between the prisoner and the table. "Give us your verdict, chief, and put an end to this."

But they all saw that the chief's lips were trembling visibly now. He could speak only with difficulty. The realization that the scene had broken the old man's spirit came suddenly to every one in that room. They all kept silence before the tragedy.

He did not speak. His massive chest heaved. His hand went to the star on his chest, a rusty, speckled piece of metal, a glorious relic of that frontier history.

He unpinned it—an operation that took some time, for his powerful hand had turned feeble, and the pin was rusted. He had kept it on that leather vest for many a long day.

He looked up at the giant Larabee, the man with the grizzled beard knotted under

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a bulldog chin. The big rancher winced somewhat.

"Larabee," the sheriff said, "it takes a hard man to rule over this here desert range. A man with a hard hand—an iron hand, an unforgivin' heart. Next to me, you're the man on this range which fits those specifications. Wear this star."

"You mean you're resignin', chief?"

"You don't mean that, chief," Swig Moran said gently. "Don't take this so hard. It ain't nothin' of your doin's. Tell us what's to be done with Harry—and we'll do same. Tell us to free him—"

"If I free him, there'll be fightin' on this range and bloodshed for days to come," the chief said. "Them bloodthirsty Papagoes will go after your sons and your wives and your daughters. I haven't the power to free him. And I haven't the power to condemn him either.

"I'm gettin' out, gents, that's the long and short of it. I'm responsible for Harry's crime. I made him. I created him. I gave him my passions—my love for the six-gun, my yearnin' for liquor, my delight in lynchin' men.

"Now, do you think I could tell you gents to go out and hang him? I guess damn well not! Larabee, pin that star on you. From this moment on you're the sheriff of this range."

Larabee, as well as every one else there, saw what was happening. The sheriff could not condemn his son to death. It was humanly impossible. But he was doing the right thing just the same, turning him over to the law. The big rancher, who had been long schooled in the Morrel code, accepted the responsibility.

"I reckon I understand, chief," he said. "For the first time in your long career you've bumped up ag'in' a job which is too much for you, which would be too much for any man.

"You're his dad. Well, I ain't. I can do this job. Me and Swig Moran here—and the three muckers who seen the Injun when he was dyin'—we can do this work. For one night," he said, pinning the star on his bearskin vest, "I'll be sheriff."

"For always," old Phineas Morrel corrected. "I'm through."

The others stared; but no one questioned. It was like questioning a badly wounded man about every detail of an accident, without any mercy for his feelings.

As the old chief went out, Harry Morrel looked at him, and for a brief moment their eyes met. It was only a glance. But Harry saw that the eyes of the old man were eagle eyes no longer—unless perhaps they might be likened to those of an eagle that has been fatally winged and is lying broken and shapeless on the ground after falling from a great height.

CHAPTER XIX.

MOONLIT PERIL.

THE old sheriff had done his work well. Even though he was no longer superintending it, the machinery which he had put into operation to trail down the gunman Gentle Ladley went on working inexorably.

Immediately upon starting out on the man hunt the sheriff had ordered posses to organize at the various ranches near the border.

He had ordered a big bunch of riders to patrol the border, while Gentle Ladley was threading his way through the deep arroyos of Borax Desert, trying to shake off the pursuers who had set out from Neutral Saddle.

Gentle Ladley's adventures up to the time he wounded Harry Morrel have already been set down in this chronicle. As the sheriff had estimated, Ladley spent much valuable time in crossing Borax Desert. By the time he came out of the desert on the south side of the Big Mesas the sheriff's net had already been cast.

Ladley found this out sooner than he had anticipated. The discovery came at what seemed a time of complete triumph. He had made good time heading south, after leaving the Big Mesas. His greatest fear had been that Harry Morrel, whom he had wounded, would be revived in time to take up the pursuit again.

As in the case of many fugitives, the fear Ladley had of all mankind in general was focused upon one man, the eagle-eyed,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

black-haired, raw-boned rider who had hunted him all the way through Borax Desert and the Big Mesas.

But something happened which very effectually wiped out this fear: Gentle Ladley stopped at a breed's xacalli outfit out on the sage-plain between the Big Mesas and the border, and there he heard the comforting news that his most dreaded pursuer had gotten into very serious trouble.

The Papago tribesmen who had found the body of Tom Gopher had spread the news everywhere. Harry Morrel, son of the sheriff, had committed a dastardly murder. Three prospectors had found him exhausted from a wound, and had arrested him!

Exhilarated by this delightful bit of news, Gentle Ladley had filled up his canteen, purchased a small grub-stake, and resumed his trail.

There was, to be exact, no trail through that sage plain. It was merely a limitless expanse of flat, sandy country, dotted with brush, and extending to a horizon as flat and unbroken as the sea. Far away, above a strata of heated air, the purple mesa of Sonora County, Mexico, appeared remote and detached from the earth like tables of rock hanging in the blue sky.

But in between Ladley and the haven for which he was trailing there presently appeared signs of life. Smirches of dun-colored mist appeared on the horizon, discoloring the white strata of heat at the bases of the mesas of Sonora.

They might have been small bunches of drags, wandering from the ranches. They might have been the smoke from cook fires of the line camps thrown out by stockmen to keep their cattle from drifting too far south.

But it was already too far south for line camps. There was no stock raising anywhere in that wide sweep of sage-dotted desert. As Ladley advanced he surmised with a constantly growing fear that those dust clouds were caused by bunches of riders.

His own horse kicked up a little cloud of alkali which trailed behind him like steam. It made enough of a signal to attract the attention of the widely deployed riders off there toward the southern horizon.

Ladley had no doubt but that those little smirches of cloud funneling out from dark specks on the horizon were riders. On the other hand, he had no proof that they were in search of him. They might be Indians heading off to the Sangre de Cristo Range. They might be breeds, cowboys—anybody, riding anywhere.

But the axiom that "a thief fears every bush an officer" was true in Ladley's case. The chances were pretty strong that a posse was down there combing the brush for a fugitive. And as Ladley was the most famous fugitive in that part of Arizona he had a very reasonable conviction that they were hunting for him.

There was one way to find out. His dust, he estimated, was conspicuous enough to have been seen by them. If he turned and headed back for the Big Mesa, they would chase him, and that would at least satisfy the grave doubts that were fermenting in his mind.

He resolved to take this course, primarily because he was no longer pressed by that overwhelming fear of Harry Morrel.

He turned his horse and at an easy canter started north for the red table lands on the horizon, which were the beginning of the Big Mesa.

It was some time before he could notice any appreciable change in the clouds of dust on the southern horizon behind him. It was some time, in fact, before his own dust cloud, moving north instead of south, indicated to those riders that Ladley had changed his mind.

But he had not ridden many miles before his fears were justified. The widely deployed line of riders was narrowing. The separate little smirches of mist were joining together like cirrus clouds in the sky gathering into one fog.

That was all he could be certain of. There was no appreciable lessening of the distance between him and the riders. He kept his horse at a good canter, carefully choosing the hard-packed sand so as to make the best time, and likewise to lessen that fatal mist of alkali.

This last precaution, however, availed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him little. They had his trail, and they were going to stick to it. It would take hours to get back to the lower mesas, which was the nearest hope he had of getting under cover.

But sunset came, long before the pursuers had made any appreciable gain. Then for a short space of darkness the fugitive slowed down, giving his horse a long-needed breathing space.

The old nag needed water and food. But there were no water pockets in that sage plain, and there was no time to give the mount a chance to forage. The only course was to press on toward the foothills of the Big Mesas.

Ladley had visions of playing hide and seek in the Big Mesa arroyos with a posse, and with a sick horse to carry him. It was paramount to get food, and water.

He passed the xacalli where a long time before he had stopped to replenish his canteen, and buy a grub outfit. The grub pack would last him a day or two. But he had bought no grain for the horse. The horse's stomach, he realized now, was of considerably more importance than his own.

The old creature had some hard trailing in front of it. Ladley did not dare to stop at the xacalli again. He must press doggedly on until he got to the mountains. There he could feed his horse. And he could get water and food for himself. He knew just the place to get it.

Concha's little ranch came vividly to his mind. He had had a strong desire to see her again, after that incident with Harry Morrel. Evidently she had been very much impressed with Harry Morrel; for she had saved his life. She would not be so impressed now, knowing that he was as much of a gunman as Ladley himself.

Ladley recalled how she had sent him off at the point of a six-gun. But that did not signify anything. A girl hates the thought of cold-blooded murder. She had saved Harry Morrel, through a sheer feminine instinct, which prompted her to side at the last moment with the man who was down and out. Well, Ladley was down and out now. He would take a chance on her showing another outburst of mercy.

He would go to her as a man with a posse hounding him to his death. He had always had success with women under conditions of that sort. In fact, even that slim, black-haired, gray-eyed girl of the Big Mesas had been very sympathetic when Ladley first went to her. He recalled how readily she had believed his protestations of innocence.

That was the one hope he had of getting food and water. She would at least give food and water for his horse. There was no doubt about that part of her character. It was an idiosyncrasy which Ladley had discovered. He would take advantage of it now.

Besides, that girl was the only one in the Big Mesas he could possibly go to. He was afraid of taking a chance on any of the prospector's shacks or diggings. And it was getting more and more dangerous to approach any of the Indians.

The first thing he knew, he would meet one who had heard of the man hunt. The hope of a reward would prompt one of them to plug Ladley in the back. He was afraid of all men—white men and breeds. But of women he was not afraid. You could always argue with them, plead, beg. And the last thing they would do would be to shoot you in the back.

He reached the foothills of the Big Mesas, and had started on the long, upward ascent when the moon glared up over the eastern rim of the world. Its rays struck the mesa cliffs while the face of the desert below and the vast horizon of sage and sand was still in darkness.

The Big Mesas flashed into view abruptly as if brought down miraculously out of the sky. Ladley looked down into the shadows below him, and presently the plain was revealed in the light.

As he gazed, the whole scene began to take shape and outline, every detail focusing sharply, the patches of sage, the alluvial fans of detritus that came down out of the cañons of the foothills, the red bowlders. To the eyes of the fugitive, dilated by riding so long in the dark, the scene was as bright as day.

Presently he saw among the black dots of sage patches, tinier, blacker dots moving along. They were like ants.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But their microscopic size, and the fact that they seemed to be moving so slowly, did not fool Gentle Ladley.

He realized that his pursuers had gained on him—halving the distance. He realized also that they rode horses that were not gaunt from hunger, or weakened by thirst.

On each stage of that journey up into the higher mesas, Ladley knew that those riders would gain on him. It was impossible to keep out of their sight—except for short intervals. It might have been day; for the quartz of the mesa cliffs, and the alkali of the plains and level spaces reflected the moon's rays, magnifying the light, and serving as a background against which any rider was sharply silhouetted.

Ladley urged his horse up the steep zigzag trails. His only hope now was to get to the girl's ranch before he was caught.

After that—well, it depended on her.

And Ladley prided himself upon his knowledge of feminine psychology. He had banked on them before, good women and bad women alike. And he had always found that under the skin they were the same; a man hounded to the death could expect help.

Concha's ranch was in a lonely fastness. For days at a time she received no visitor. Prospectors from Neutral Saddle generally took trails that threaded the lower cañons. Papago hunters knew of more accessible water holes.

The few sheepherders that had outfits in that wilderness grazed their flocks on bottomlands. They never went up to Concha's mesa—except when they took her some sick animal for healing.

On this particular night, however, Concha's bleak little domain was visited by many men. And they came in rapid succession.

It is always a temptation to attribute vague fears and restlessness to that unexplained and undefined sense called intuition. Concha, in her hermitlike life, her communion with the vast and silent wilderness, had developed a side of her nature which, it must be admitted, had little to do with the five ordinary senses.

It was more like the instinct of the deer that knows where water is, or of the bird that knows the speckled scales of a snake are something to be greatly abhorred.

Suffice it to say that while Harry Morrel was being tried down there in that ramshackle sheep ranch, not far away from Concha's mesa, the girl was awakened in the dead of night by an indescribable premonition of disaster. Some people believe in telepathy, and they would very readily recognize this instance as a manifestation of it.

There is no doubt that Harry Morrel was thinking of the girl at the time. He was thinking intently, hoping with a desperate hope that she had not failed to burn that bit of rawhide with the Morrel brand which he had given to her. It meant everything; it meant the honor of his father's name. It meant that the son would not have died in vain.

And Concha was thinking of the gray-faced, wounded youth who had come to her shack with those three prospectors a few nights before.

This would look like a clear case of telepathy. But it is not necessary to cite any such problematical phenomenon of psychology. The dramatic crisis was coming just the same. Concha lay in bed, with the full moon shining upon her face. This alone might have awakened her.

She tossed about for a long time, unable to set her mind at rest. It was tortured with vivid pictures, the picture of a ragged man with childlike blue eyes, and a smile that revealed two buck teeth; the picture of a tall, eagle-eyed youth falling to his knees with a bullet in his arm; the picture of three desert muckers sitting about her table eating hungrily, casting furtive glances about, their red faces perspiring in the hot glare of the oil lamp; the picture of a shifty-eyed Papago Indian leading a lame calico; and finally the picture and the smell of a bit of horse hide burning in a fire of piñon knots.

Those were the glimpses she had had of the tragedy that was now moving to its climax. The tragedy had started long before those few scenes crossed her life; it had gone on toward an inevitable conclusion—after the curtain was brought down upon

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the scattered moments which she had been allowed to witness.

It is little wonder that for hours—ever since the last departure of Harry Morrel—she had been brooding over every aspect, every detail, every word, every look and gesture.

There was one point which had seemed to her a discrepancy in the logical unfolding of events. Harry Morrel had given her that precious bit of hide to burn. It was natural enough for him to trust her with that duty. She already knew everything. He held no secrets from her regarding his father's guilt in the death of Calibers and Trommer.

But why hadn't he burned the hide himself? Or why didn't he keep it, and burn it later? It was certain that the most vital thing in his life was the necessity of burning that brand. Why did he trust such a duty to some one else?

There were many answers to these questions. There were, in fact, so many answers that it kept the girl worrying for hours at a time, until it became actually an obsession.

He had fainted from his wound, and the prospectors had found him—before he had a chance to burn it. That much was very easily understood. But why did he not burn it afterward? Why had he not left the supper table at her ranch that night, and burned it while the hungry muckers were gorging themselves?

This point suggested another, which she immediately rejected: *the prospectors would not let him out of the room.* She recalled that whereas Grannas had gone out alone to take care of the thirsty nags, and one of the Simpson brothers had gone out to saddle them, and the other Simpson to get a pail of water, that Harry had always remained in the room—and that one of the three muckers had always remained at the same time.

But this was natural enough; Harry was wounded, and naturally the others attended to any chores that had to be done. He could not have been a prisoner. It was too ridiculous.

The whole tone of bantering good will which he had displayed to the three muckers contradicted this possibility. Besides, if he had been a prisoner, he was enough of a fighter to escape. He would not have submitted so easily to three old men guarding him.

But this led to another train of thought: It concerned that horse thief, the Papago, Tom Gopher, who had brought the lame calico to her ranch. Just what had become of him? Just how had Harry Morrel got the horse?

Again there were many possible answers to this. But it was a question to which her mind returned repeatedly, like a squirrel whirling about in a cage.

Inasmuch as Harry had made no mention of the Indian, she had assumed immediately that the Papago was of no importance in the situation; the horse could have been taken away from him—perhaps while Tom Gopher was gathering sage sticks for a fire. It could have been taken from him under his very nose; Tom Gopher would not have palavered about it.

The girl had dismissed the point at first as being of little significance. She had had no chance to ask Morrel about the Indian, because there was always one of those three muckers in the room. And that led her back to the first quandary: were they purposely in that room, guarding Harry as a prisoner?

One detail which bolstered up this fear was the fact that she could not for the life of her remember that Harry was carrying his six-gun. That in itself may not have been very significant. He was a pretty sick man, after riding into the furnace heat of the cañon, when he trailed the Papago.

The muckers had found him unconscious. What more natural, then, but that he discard his holster and six-gun—which made a pretty heavy load for a sick man? Furthermore, he had no need of it, now that these three muckers were taking care of him.

Just the same, it would have dispelled a very insistent fear if the girl could have remembered that gun. If she had only gone out into the corral and examined Harry's saddle pack, she would have noticed that the Winchester which he carried in a scabbard, slung across the side of his horse, was no longer there.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But none of these fears entered her mind when the four men came to her that night. Her one concern was for Harry's wound. It was long after he had left that she began to have a premonition that something was wrong.

The band of moonlight shining through her window passed by her face, leaving her in the dark again. She lapsed into a fitful moment of sleep. And then she was awakened by a vague feeling that she had heard something out there in the corral. Or else, while deeper in that nap of sleep, she had been warned subconsciously that a horse was clipclopping up the trail from the cañon to the south.

Travelers passed by that way, as I have said, very rarely. But there had been times when in the dead of night some rider had led his horse to her water hole, and ridden on. She was never alarmed. Her own horses, wandering about the corral, might have awakened her at this particular time.

But because of the uneasy state of her mind, she was brought sharp awake. And this time, her first thought upon awakening was an illuminating one: Harry Morrel's one aim in life now was to save his father. Perhaps he was sacrificing himself.

Perhaps he had enacted a part when he came to her that night with the three prospectors. Perhaps he was acting in some hideous tragedy which he—as well as the three old prospectors—were hiding from the girl.

The prospectors had told her that they were going to take Harry down to a breed sheep ranch in Trade Rat Gulch, and leave him there until he was strong enough to cross the desert. If he had need of her, they had promised, they would send some one for her.

She had heard no further word from them, and had, of course, assumed that Harry's wound was healing. She had inferred from Harry's youthful strength and spirits that the wound would give him little further trouble.

But now—in the death-like silence of the night, on top of that mesa—all the questions that had been troubling her mind began to take definite form. Harry was in trouble. He had been in trouble when he came to her that night.

What had happened to the Papago? Why did Harry give her that brand, instead of keeping it to burn? Why couldn't she remember whether or not he had a six-gun? In nursing his wound she had had plenty of chance to find out. Why did Harry let those muckers stay in the room when he had so many serious matters to discuss with her?

All these questions were magnified suddenly to gigantic and fearful problems. In the morning she might have dismissed them all—but not now. She was in a veritable torture.

Getting up from her bunk, she lit the jack-lantern and dressed. Under the moonlight it would be an easy ride to Trade Rat Gulch. It would be much more pleasant than trailing down there under the blazing desert sun. Anyway she could not wait until morning. She must go to that sheep ranch and find out just what had happened.

It was a matter of but a few moments before she had laced up her riding boots and pulled on her gloves. Outside the scene was dazzlingly bright, the moon glittering on vast surfaces of quartz and sandstone and alkali. Yonder across the deep shadows of a cañon another mesa was lifted up, massive and glorious, as if its strata were of gold and platinum.

In the corral a burro was standing with head hanging low in sleep. Near the water hole were two milk-white saddle horses, transformed to fairylike steeds in that light. She took a saddle from the peg on the side of the main shack, and whistled, in response to which one of the white broncs came to her.

She was about to swing the saddle to its back, when she saw the elongated shadow of a man fall across the ground of the corral, casting the silhouette of a shapeless hat upon the white horse.

She wheeled about, dropped the saddle, and reached for her gun. It was rarely that she ever went out in those cañons armed. And then it was never in fear of men, but of wild stallions. To-night she had her gun. It might have been the anticipation that she would be called upon to use it in Harry Morrel's defense. It

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

might have been because she had a subconscious fear that Gentle Ladley had not crossed the border, but was lurking about, cornered by a posse.

The dark form that had leaped from behind a shed was now kneeling before her. A viselike hand had reached across the saddle on the ground, and was gripping her wrist, the wrist of her gun hand.

"I'm on my knees before you, señorita. I'm begging you to save me—as you did before."

The moonlight shining full upon the upturned face revealed two buck-teeth and a grin.

She dropped the gun—a sacrifice that was necessary in order to free herself from that dreaded grip. Then leaping back, she turned and raced to her little shanty.

She put all her weight against the door in an attempt to slam it shut. But the intruder, racing with her, had reached the threshold in time to insert his foot between the door and the warped jamb.

She was unable to slide the crossbar into place.

CHAPTER XX.

MORREL PRIDE.

OUT of the littered, weedy corral of Miguel, the sheepherder, there rode a tall, dejected scarecrow of a man. His scrawny hands rested one on top of the other, on the saddle-horn, his head was bent forward so that the tilted lop-brimmed sombrero revealed a mane of silvery white hair.

Old Phineas Morrel let his horse take the trail—apparently any trail the creature had a fancy to.

The broken chief had nothing more to do with that tragedy in the sheep ranch. His son was in there, now at the mercy of the flint-hearted old pioneer, Larabee. What Larabee's next move would be was not at all problematical in Morrel's mind. Larabee was an uncompromising man. He had fought long under the old leader and had learned his ways, the ways of the Western sheriff. Hang a man when caught—that was the code. The red tape of law that entangled justice was not bothered with on the Western plains. Sheriff Morrel had taught his henchman that code.

Of course, this would be Larabee's first experience at giving the out-and-out order for a lynching. It might give some men pause, but not this man. Two men stopping at his ranch had been murdered—one in the bunk shack, another in a gully some distance away. The murderer had not been caught.

The whole range was up in arms, clamoring for justice. And here was another murderer, caught and convicted on his own word. What mercy did he deserve, particularly at a time like this? The "new sheriff" must start in on his career with a firm hand.

But Phineas Morrel would not be a witness to that scene. Already the series of events leading up to that palaver in the sheep ranch had broken old Morrel's spirit. The palaver itself was a lurid, hideous scene that he remembered as if in a fit of delirium tremens.

He rode away. He was escaping a corner of hell.

Now, the well-established law of human psychology, that the criminal goes back to the scene of his crime, has certain curious manifestations. It was dominating the distracted and broken old chief when he left that ranch.

But it was manifesting itself in a very complex and strange way. He had killed two men, Calibers and Trommer, but he did not revisit the scenes of those two crimes. The particular crime which obsessed him at this moment was the murder of that Papago Indian.

Although this murder had been committed by his son, Phineas Morrel had an insistent illusion that he himself was responsible. Harry Morrel was his own flesh and blood. The old chief had bequeathed him a legacy of hot-headed passions, of hatred for the tricky breeds of the desert, of a love for hard drinking, and combat. His son's acts were upon his head; he was his son's keeper. But he had not fulfilled the duties of his stewardship.

He led his horse to the trail that skirted Concha's mesa toward the gulch where the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Papago had been found. Once the bronc was on the trail, the rider let it jog along, choosing its own gait, choosing its own course around bowlder or mesquite clump or barrel cactus.

The rider just sat there with hands on pommel, reins hanging, as though he were a prisoner with manacled wrists going to his doom.

How much happier he would have been if the giant Larabee and Swig Moran and those three muckers back there would lynch him in his son's stead!

Just what he would do when he reached the gulch he did not know. He did not care about future acts. He had forgotten all about that gunman Ladley. He had forgotten all about the riders that were strung along the border.

He was thinking only of his son Harry, who, after all, was bad. He was thinking of the murdered Papago. The body would not be there in the gulch; for other tribesmen had taken it away while the aged herald-priest and the victim's sister had gone in search of revenge.

The horse would be there—or at least what the coyotes and buzzards had left of it. The cliff would be there. Phineas Morrel had a morbid curiosity to see just how high that cliff was, and how horrible the death had been.

Now, the riders that had come up from the border trailing Gentle Ladley back to Concha's mesa had spread out in a wide defile when darkness came, so that their fugitive would have no chance of doubling back on his tracks and escaping to the border again.

When moonlight came they again sighted their man high up on the clearly illumined cliffs of the mesa side. They had gathered together again and started the ascent of the mesa, choosing the trail that had led through the nearest gulch.

As they rode up the dry stream bed into the narrowing gorge they came upon a strange figure standing out in the middle of a bowlder wash, his sombrero in his hand, his head bowed, the moon shining brilliantly upon a mane of long, silvery hair.

"It's the chief!" one of the riders cried, galloping his horse up to where old Morrel was standing.

"What-all are you doin' here, chief?" another asked. "Git to your mount and ride along with us. We're hot on the hellbender's trail."

"I ain't your chief any more," Morrel said, still standing irresolute, gaunt, his shoulders bowed. "Larabee—he's your chief now."

"What and the hell's happened?" another cried, dismounting and going to the old man.

"Been ridin' too hard, chief," said another gently. "The country down here's like hell with the blower off."

"They've got him back there," the old man said tonelessly. "Larabee's got him. They're goin' to lynch him. If Larabee takes the advice I always give him in the past, he'll have lynched him by now, I reckon."

"You hear that, men?" the first rider called out to the others as they gathered around and dismounted. "The hellbender is caught."

"Where did he get caught?" asked another of the riders.

"Right here—right here, where I'm standin'," Morrel said.

The men looked around at each other. Something was wrong. Their leader, who was also their protector, their god, was confused. His keen, steel-like mind was faltering.

"'Tain't possible, chief. We seen him just a little while ago halfway up that thar mesa cliff. We seen him to-day ridin' hellbent down toward us when we was patrollin' the border; then he rode back, and we been racin' with him all afternoon and all evenin' up till now."

"Racin' with who?" the old man asked, turning a bewildered face upon them. The silence that answered this gave the distracted old fellow time to think. He had sent these riders down to the border to prevent the escape of a gunman, a fugitive from a Nevada jail. He remembered now. But how insignificant that gunman was—in comparison to Morrel's own dearly loved gunman, his son!

"I wasn't speakin' about him, gents,"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he said in a different voice. "I was speakin' about my boy."

The deputies again stood there, silent, respectful ghosts.

Then old Morrel gave them the customary cue that broke the spell. "Give me a drink."

Several proffered their flasks, and as he took one they waited as respectfully as before. Then the chief wiped his mouth and seemed to straighten up slightly. "There's the carcass of a horse around here somewheres. Cain't seem to locate it—but it fell from up yonder into this gulch.

"The Papago ridin' it fell likewise. So Harry was guilty. I admit that. Ain't no more palaverin'. Harry's got my bad blood. But that ain't got nothin' to do with you gents. Larabee will attend to the boy. I give him up."

"We're plumb sorry, chief. Sorry as hell."

"Now you better ride on," the old man said quietly.

This awakened them all to the duty at hand.

"You got to ride with us, chief," some one said.

"Yes, we ain't goin' to leave you moonin' down here alone. You come along."

"You lead us! Same as always."

"We'll git our man with you leadin' us."

"Here's another drink, chief," said one of them, proffering a second flask. "Drink it, and we'll git to our work—you leadin'."

He drained the flask, stood a moment uncertainly looking about at the bowlders and mesquite clumps and sand dunes. Finally he shook his head.

They watched him as he covered his silvery mane with the huge five-gallon sombrero and stalked over toward his horse. He stumbled, or rather staggered slightly, in crossing a sand dune, and one of the men helped him, taking his arm and leading him to the waiting mount.

They paused until he was in the saddle, and then abruptly they all turned and jumped for their horses.

One of the riders spurred his mount immediately to its fastest gallop. The others followed, a big group trailing along now in single, now in double file. At the rear two riders rode along at an easy canter with Phineas Morrel in between them.

They did not speak. They were all on the trail—a man hunt—and that one thought was in their minds. The chief did not urge his horse. He rode as he had ridden those few miles from the sheep ranch, giving the horse its head, and riding like an inert weight, with hands resting in utter dejection upon the pommel. They had never seen him ride that way before, as though balancing himself by the pommel.

But the sturdy mount, the best horse in that country for desert trailing, broke into a fast canter; and when they hit the steep mule deer trails going up the mesa side it pressed ahead of the two riders that were accompanying the chief.

Then as all the horses of the posse slowed to the upward climb, it passed one and then another. It was comparatively fresh, a stallion of unlimited strength; whereas the mounts of the rest of the posse were tuckered out from the long race of the afternoon.

"Where is he now?" one of the riders in the rear asked.

"Up about in the middle of the file!"

Then, later: "Chief seems to be gettin' ahead."

The riders had strung out their horses, struggling along in an extended file.

"Where's he at now?"

"Just passed the front rider."

"H-m! That critter of his sure kin eat up mountain trail."

"Is that him 'way in the lead?" another asked.

"Looks thataway, judgin' from the moonlight on the back of his head."

"He's ridin' with head bowed—so's his sombrero is tipped."

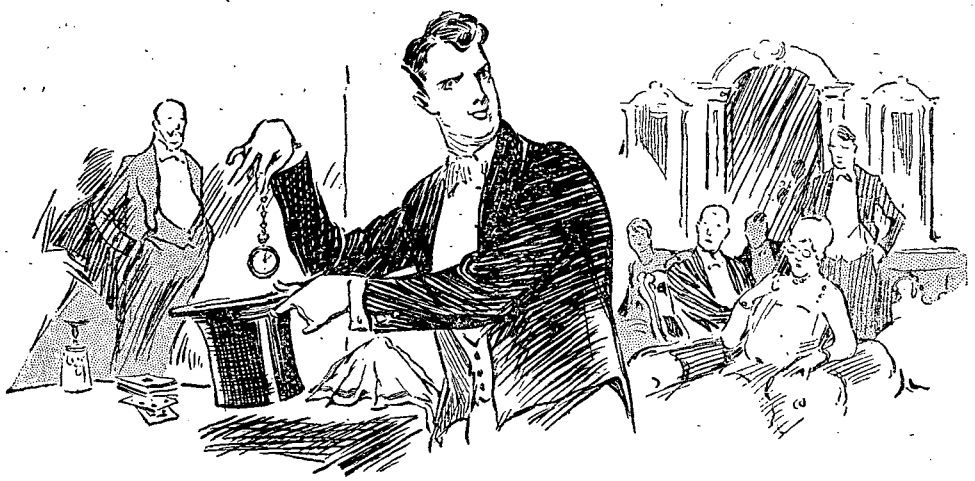
"Seems like he's doin' some hard figurin'."

"He's thinkin' of Gentle Ladley—and he'll be the one to git him—alone. Same as always."

"It's his horse that's thinkin' of Gentle Ladley," another objected wisely. "The chief's thinkin' of his son."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Barry Loses a Trick

By GORDON STILES

IN the living room of the Wilmots' apartment a nice little neighborly group was gathered; besides Hank and Nancy Wilmot, there were Jim Dorsey and his wife, Eileen, Bert and Mary Lester, Barry and Sue Thomas, and Mr. and Mrs. Milton Crane.

The last couple are mentioned in a more formal manner because they did not belong to the nice little neighborly group mentioned above. They came from Flushing while all of the others were part and parcel of New York's recent expansion which took unto itself the name of Bywood.

There had been some bridge earlier in the evening and sticky looking cocktail glasses roosting here and there bore witness to the Wilmots' inclination to entertain in the manner which has won more and more approval since Congress said we couldn't. The cards, however, lay in jaded disorder save one pack, which Barry Thomas held in his hand. This, he presently handed to Mrs. Crane, saying: "Shuffle them, please."

Mr. Crane, hugging his wife's elbow, whispered to her: "Riffle them, Cassie."

Cassie did so, and Barry smiled at the gesture. He was accustomed to have folks riffle cards "on him." And it made no shade of difference.

Cassie passed the deck back to Barry, and her eyes, like those of her husband's, never left the face of the performer. A bit to Cassie's left and slightly in front of her, Sue Thomas sat, also watching her husband.

Nancy was whispering to her husband that there was probably enough gin left for another shakerful of cocktails. The Dorseys and Lesters lounged in their chairs and looked patient.

They all knew what was coming when Barry took the floor and Barry inevitably did just that when strangers were present. Of course, Sue knew all about it, too—far more than any of the others.

But Sue was Barry's wife and her conception of her duties as such would not permit her to crab Barry's game. She hadn't, either, during six years of life with one of the cleverest amateur conjurers in New York.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Barry turned hypnotic eyes on Cassie Crane.

"Think of a card, please," he said, falling into the soothing murmur that was a part of all his tricks. "Ah! You have thought of a card. I can see that you have thought of a card. Yes. M-m! Where would you like your card to be? On the top, in the middle or at the bottom of the pack?"

"On the top," Cassie said, and Barry held out the pack. "Take it, then. There—nine of spades. Was that the card you thought of?"

Cassie held the bit of pasteboard between her thumb and forefinger. Her mouth sagged open in surprise. She stared at Barry in astonishment and admiration.

"But how? I don't see! Why, Mr. Thomas, it's wonderful! It's positively uncanny! Milt, how does he do it?"

Thus approached, Milton said he didn't know, thereby lowering himself six point two degrees in his wife's estimation. Worse than that, Milt admitted himself utterly mystified.

Barry threw himself into action again. From his waistcoat pocket he drew an ever ready packet of cigarette papers. This he placed in Milton's hand.

"Would you mind taking out two pieces of paper?"

Milton did not mind; he produced the two papers and handed them to Barry. At the request of the latter the packet was laid on the table, well out of Barry's reach. that individual held up one of the papers, turning it about in the most approved manner. He said: "Now I will tear this paper into small pieces," and proceeded to do so, rolling the fragments into a tight wad.

This wad he handed to Cassie, saying: "Hold it between your thumb and forefinger, please. Hold it tightly." Cassie obliged.

"The other paper, then," Barry said, displaying it to all, "I will fold—this way, and this way. Now, Mr. Crane, kindly tear out the corner where it is folded. There, that's right. Now when I open it, there is a little hole in the center, is there not?"

As it could be plainly seen there *was* a hole in the center, nobody took issue on the point.

This paper, likewise, was rolled into a wad by Barry's deft fingers.

"If Mr. Crane will hold this in the same manner as Mrs. Crane holds the other one," he murmured. "Ah! Yes. Now, then—you, Mrs. Crane, have in your fingers the paper which has been torn into bits. Is that not right?"

"Yes," breathed Cassie, expectantly.

"And you, Mr. Crane, are holding the one with the hole in the center."

"That's right," agreed Milton.

"Good! Now watch me; look at me." They did, and Barry resumed: "Do you both feel a tingling sensation in your finger tips, in the fingers holding the paper?"

"Yes! Yes, I do!" Cassie declared, excitedly. Milton said: "Seems to me I do."

"Ah!" said Barry. He paused, the others in the room looked up from the cocktails Hank had just served. It seemed necessary, somehow, to attend when Barry reached this point.

"Now you will find, Mrs. Crane, that the two papers have changed places. You are holding the one with the hole in the middle and Mr. Crane has the one which has been torn into small bits! Open them, please; see if that is not so."

Cassie unfolded her paper, sank limply into a chair. Milton exclaimed: "Gosh! That's amazing!"

Hank butted in with the cocktail tray. Barry took his drink in one gulp and was off again. "Mr. Crane, will you loan me some article of value, such as a ring or a watch? Either will do."

Two hours later, it was after one o'clock, and Barry still held the floor. Desultory efforts had been made to start conversation on general topics by Hank Wilmot and Jim Dorsey; Eileen had endeavored to interest Cassie in the new dress of a prospective bride.

In all of these abortive attempts, Sue Thomas had been a willing abettor. But to no avail. Barry stood firm, stronger than ever. Cassie was thrilled. Milton eagerly interested.

Barry was holding both Cassie's hands.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Think of somebody who has died recently, some one you knew well. Think. Think—"

Mary Lester was on her feet. "Bert," she said, "we really must break away. I know it's awful, but Bert has to get up so early and—"

Nancy said: "Pshaw! It's early, Mary." Her hand stifled a yawn quite successfully. A moment later, Sue was listening to the ravings of Cassie Crane.

"Mrs. Thomas, your husband is *perfectly wonderful!* How he ever does all those things! Does he tell you how he does them? Do you understand all of his tricks? Why! It's the most marvelous thing I ever saw in my life! Now Milton couldn't—Milton hasn't—"

"Barry is very clever," Sue said and smiled.

But her lips tightened ever so little when she turned away from Cassie and hovered at her husband's elbow as he talked rapidly into the ear of Milton, who nodded vigorously and murmured: "I see. I see."

II.

THE Thomases rode home in the Dorseys' car; they had none of their own. Barry's three hundred and fifty dollars a month as a research worker in the employ of the Tuthill Foundation for Scientific Advancement would not permit of such a luxury.

Sue did not mind that, particularly. They could get about and they had plenty of entertaining friends who could take their bridge or leave it alone.

It had taken Sue a long time to learn why she was not entirely happy in her married life. But she had known for more than a year now.

It was those tricks of Barry's. Those and his dissertations on mind reading and chemical reactions and sex psychology and European politics.

Not that she objected to his being posted on these and other deep subjects. It was his habit of stampeding a perfectly good party that had got under her skin.

As long as only those who had witnessed Barry's repertoire were present, all was well. But where more than half a dozen people were gathered, it was more than likely that some one of them would be meeting Barry for the first time. Which, to him, was as the starting signal in a horse race.

His technique was flawless, Sue had to admit. Smoothly, without any apparent effort on Barry's part, the opening would come. Once he had got a toe hold, the party was his for the balance of the evening.

If the opportunity he sought came late, the session was that much prolonged, as had been the case to-night.

Dozens of times, lately, Sue had cherished sentiments of murder or slow torture toward some luckless friend who had suggested: "Barry, do a few stunts for us, will you? Lawson, here, has never seen your stuff."

And the worst of it was that Sue did not know what to do about it all.

At first she had thought it amusing; she could understand how Barry's program fascinated those who witnessed it for the first time. Once she had enjoyed having people rave to her about her husband. But that was not true any more; when another woman trotted out a line of superlatives now, Sue felt herself curl up inwardly—felt her soul congeal.

And it was becoming harder and harder for her to frame her lips into the prideful smile which she knew would be expected.

Perhaps, she thought bitterly, she was all wrong to feel as she did. But her nerves had become frayed from thinking about it. The thing had happened so often of late.

Why, it had reached the point where Hank and Bert and Jim had ceased to pretend an interest in Barry's doings; had not even tried to conceal their boredom. Too, their wives were not far behind in this respect.

But Barry appeared totally oblivious to these manifestations; the thought that he might ruin an evening for anybody was simply not possible to him.

Sue's ears burned whenever she recalled the word that had come to her indirectly—it had been through the medium of a conversation to which she had been an unwilling eavesdropper—of how Barry's business associates and acquaintances looked upon him as something of a clown. Than which

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nothing could be worse where prospects of advancement were concerned.

Sue knew that, but it had been driven home with a vengeance by Barry's failure to secure a most desirable post in the department of Egyptology at the foundation.

The job paid eight thousand dollars a year, and Barry was the logical man for the place. At least, both of them had thought so and had looked forward to his appointment to the vacancy. The bringing in of an outsider whose qualifications did not appear any better than Barry's, let alone the latter's period of service, had been a terrific shock.

It was after this happened that Sue made her first tentative effort to make Barry understand. She had said, with studied half playfulness: "You should have cinched the job, by palming it—same as you do a quarter. What's the good of being a conjurer if you can't turn it to some account? I'll bet if you had spent as much time studying up on Egypt as you do working out new tricks and reading about uncanny and weird subjects, they would have just *had* to give you the place."

To which Barry replied bitterly: "I could have handled the job easily. They knew it, too. Nothing but politics—damned politics!"

Sue remained unconvinced, however. Barry had an able, active mind. His instant grasp of a subject into which he burrowed had proved this time and again.

Aside from the fact that his hobby was hurting him—hurting them—materially, she felt that, unless the state of affairs could be broken to him gently, their social desirability would be voided and their married life utterly wrecked.

She wondered if she was not taking it all too seriously. Sue wanted to be fair. Perhaps if she got away for a while—Aunt Constance had been begging for a visit—she would speak to Barry in the morning.

She did. "I think I'd like to visit Aunt Connie," she told him. "She is opening upoher place at Lake Sunapee this week. Would you mind if I went up for three or four weeks, Barry? I've promised and promised her, but never seem to get there. What do you think, Barry?"

"I think it would be fine, Sue. Go ahead. I might run up for a week-end and bring you back at the end of your stay. Do you good, and I'll be all right here."

So Sue wrote Aunt Constance and departed the following week.

III.

It was delightful to recline in a steamer chair on the wide, shining veranda of Constance Baird's summer home, to realize that she had nothing to do except as she pleased, to look out over the blue-green lake and watch the activity along the strand. Comfortable. Restful. And, thank Heaven, two hundred and fifty miles from card tricks and fortune telling and sleight of hand!

Sue inhaled a long breath of the spicy air and sighed with contentment. Aunt Constance came out and sat by her.

"Glad to be here, Sue?" she asked affectionately.

Sue patted the other's hand. "So glad that I can't express it," she said. "I didn't realize until now how much I needed a holiday."

"That's the way it goes," said her aunt. "You'll have two days to rest up in. I have not planned any 'doings' until Thursday. Then I am giving a dinner to some of my old friends here. Sort of start the season off, you know. I hope you will have a good time, Sue. I'll see that you do."

"There's no question about that." Sue wanted to add: "Any place where there are no parlor tricks will make a new woman of me."

Aunt Connie went inside to answer the telephone. On her return, she announced: "The Westcotts. They have arrived. That means that my dinner will be a success. They are jolly and they always have interesting guests."

"Fine!" murmured Sue, languidly.

Returning from a drive in the big motor car next morning, Aunt Constance said: "I want to drop in on the Westcotts for a minute, ask them to come for dinner tomorrow night." She ran up the path and disappeared inside the impressive portals

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the summer mansion which the Westcotts referred to as "The Shanty." Sue lolled in the car and felt happy.

Presently Aunt Constance hurried out toward the car.

"You must come in for a minute," she said. "They want to see you, dear." Then, as they mounted the steps, she whispered to her niece: "We're in luck—you are, anyway. There's a guest—a man—"

But they were at the drawing-room door and the Westcotts were coming forward, beaming upon Sue and her aunt. In their wake trailed a tall man.

Sue was presented to Mr. and Mrs. Westcott. Then Aunt Constance said: "I would like to introduce Mr. La Fitte, Sue. He is an old friend, too."

Mr. La Fitte extended an immaculate, long-fingered hand to the one Sue offered, and Aunt Constance burbled: "Mr. La Fitte has been visiting Mr. and Mrs. Westcott for years, but I had no idea he came along with them this time. You two ought to get on splendidly, dear. You know Mr. La Fitte is the foremost professional magician and conjurer in the country, and I've already told him about Barry."

The fingers which had rested in those of Mr. La Fitte went suddenly cold. The smile Sue managed was a replica of those stock articles which she had been using so long back in New York.

With an effort, she stifled a gasp. Mr. La Fitte's words came from a long distance: "I've asked to be permitted to take you in to dinner to-morrow night."

Sue groaned mentally. So this was what she had come here for! To crash, head-on, into the very thing she had fled from.

And now Aunt Constance was messing things up worse than ever by saying: "You will let us see some of your tricks, won't you, Mr. La Fitte? Sue will be so interested!"

Mr. La Fitte answered, bowing: "Of course, if you wish it, Mrs. Baird."

IV.

Sue knew her duty as a guest. To the most minute observer, she appeared to be the most interested member of Mr. LaFitte's audience when he performed a few "simple illusions" next evening. And all through dinner, she had chatted animatedly with the gentleman.

As a matter of fact, she found him an interesting and intelligent person. She set her teeth and endured the tricks, that was all.

He and she were together a great deal during the weeks that followed. He rode well and knew a lot about the books and music that Sue liked. If only she could dissociate him from his normal activities, she believed that she would like him vastly.

She must tell Barry about him. Not that she wanted to do so, but she knew the two would be bound to meet when Barry came for her.

Back in sweltering New York, Barry strolled slowly along the short block between the bus line and his own door. He glowed with the satisfaction of an evening well spent.

There had been a number of strangers at the party the Lesters had given that evening, and Barry had a feeling that he had outdone himself. As he passed into the vestibule of the apartment house, he plucked from the mail box a letter in Sue's handwriting. Inside the flat he read:

> . . . La Fitte—you've heard of him, of course—is here with the Westcotts and he comes around to Aunt Connie's a lot. Quite an interesting man aside from his cleverness in his profession . . .

"Golly!" exclaimed Barry to himself. "Golly! I must try to sneak a few extra days when I go up. La Fitte! Gosh! If I knew what that lad does, I'd—I'd—well, I'd have the bunch standing on their heads!"

He wrote Sue what he had in mind, but he never carried out his plan. For the very good reason that Sue arrived home, floated in suddenly and quite unheralded. That was two days before Barry was to have started out to fetch her.

She could not explain why she came, she said. Just decided that she'd like to be at home again. Which Barry could not but accept.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He did not see her wince when he began to talk of conjuring, basing his remarks on the fact that she had seen so much of La Fitte. He inquired minutely into the tricks Sue had seen the famous magician perform, speculated as to the means employed until Sue declared herself tired out and went off to bed.

V.

CERTAINLY it seemed as if fate must have cut into the game on the night when the Thomas family went to dinner at the home of Sarah Cornwell, a wealthy widow whom Sue had met at Lake Sunapee. The two women had taken a strong fancy to each other, and Mrs. Cornwell had Sue and Barry down within a week after her return to the city.

She occupied a large suite in one of the fanciest Park Avenue apartment houses. The other guests, too, smelled of money, as Barry crudely put it, in an aside to Sue.

The dinner was most elaborate. Afterward, coffee and liqueurs were served in the drawing-room. Sue could see that Barry was fidgeting under the flow of small talk, that he was, "r'arin' to go," so to speak.

At that she could not repress a slight feeling of amusement at the thought of how Barry would presently take the party entirely out of the hands of their hostess.

And Barry did. It was most natural, too. Mrs. Cornwell mentioned La Fitte to Sue and it was not more than five minutes later when Barry was calling for a pack of cards. That settled it.

Sue knew that Barry was good for at least two hours, perhaps more, with all these strangers. She invoked her usual assumed air of proprietary pride in her husband's doings and did it creditably.

She knew almost the exact order in which Barry would trot out his stunts; she could have repeated in advance the words he would use. She could imitate almost perfectly his soothing murmur.

Ugh! The others were gathered about Barry, hanging on every word he spoke, every move he made. His face was flushed and animated.

In the course of time Barry sprang his favorite. From a neighbor he borrowed a small pocket knife. This he passed to the guest at his other elbow.

"Examine it, please, and pass it on. Just so you will see that it is an ordinary pocket knife. Will the last to look it over kindly place it on the table and cover it with a napkin or handkerchief?"

The knife was passed from hand to hand, scrutinized in the solemn manner which always obtains on such occasions. There were unintelligible murmurs, much nodding of heads. Finally the last member of the group laid the knife on the table and dropped a napkin loosely over it.

Barry looked swiftly at the ring of faces surrounding him, said: "Now, the knife is under the napkin, is it not? You are all sure of that? Ah! I perceive that one gentleman is not positive in his own mind. Well, we are bound to have a skeptic now and then. And, I must admit, that is how I am frequently caught. Let us see if the knife really is there."

He lifted the napkin almost reluctantly, it seemed. But, sure enough, the knife was there.

"You see, it is there," Barry said and replaced the bit of cloth.

"Now," he said as he withdrew from the table, "I will endeavor to make the knife disappear. Suppose we all fall back and give the charm I shall use a chance to work?"

He set the example and the others drew back with him, forming a little snarl of people, perhaps ten feet from the table.

"Better form a circle around it," Barry suggested, and this was done.

Presently he said: "Will some one—any one—please lift the napkin now?"

The person nearest the table did so. The knife had disappeared. Everybody looked blankly at Barry. The latter beamed.

"Evidently," he declared, "my theory that inanimate objects know their owners, know where they belong, is true."

He turned to the owner of the knife.

"Will you kindly see if your knife has not returned to you, sir? Yes, in the same pocket from which you took it."

Under the excited scrutiny of the others,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the gentleman thus addressed plunged his hand into his pocket and in a dazed manner, drew forth the knife. Swelling chorus of approval from the men; shrill exclamations of amazement from the feminine contingent. Barry stood smiling at their tribute.

Mrs. Cornwell, looking more dumfounded than any of the others, took a step toward Barry. She said: "Would you mind doing that again for us, Mr. Thomas? It's the most astonishing thing!"

Barry said: "Certainly not, Mrs. Cornwell. If somebody will loan me—"

Mrs. Cornwell stripped a ring from her finger. "Here. Will this do?"

Barry hesitated for a moment. "We can try," he said. "We shall see what happens."

He took the ring, a magnificent thing of diamonds and emeralds, and turned it over to the person next to him. Quickly the formula was carried out, exactly as before.

Again Barry detected a doubting Thomas and exposed the ring where it nestled under its covering. Once more the party drew back and formed a ring. They waited for Barry to speak.

He looked at the innocent napkin, frowned as if perplexed about something. Mrs. Cornwell stared at her finger as if expecting to see the ring leap into place.

Finally Barry said: "H-m! Somehow, the ring does not respond properly to the charm I have woven about it. It is rebellious. Ah, well. Let us see. Will somebody kindly remove the cloth from the ring?"

They leaned forward eagerly as the napkin was lifted. The ring was gone!

"I am afraid," said Barry after a few seconds, "that your ring is very naughty, Mrs. Cornwell. It refuses absolutely to return to its place on your finger, as a well-behaved ring should do in these circumstances. But—since it has gone astray, perhaps we can yet locate it."

He paused dramatically, then pointed an accusing finger at a man on the far rim of the circle.

"You, sir! I am surprised. I am sorry, too, that I must expose you. But the ring is valuable, you see. So if you will be good enough to remove it from your waistcoat pocket—the right hand one, please—I can then restore it to its owner."

The man thus addressed flushed and looked embarrassed, fumbled with his fingers in his pocket. Then, with a sheepish look, he tried the one on the opposite side.

"It isn't there," he said with something like relief in his voice.

"Nonsense!" Barry advanced to where the other stood. "Let me try."

The victim dropped his hands while Barry ran his forefinger into the pocket he had specified. Then, it was his turn to look blank.

He tried the other pocket, drew back, evidently nonplused.

The crowd burst into loud laughter. Very clever. This, of course, was part of the trick. They waited for Barry to confound them once more by some new aspect of the business.

But Barry didn't. He stood staring weakly about him, a dull red glow creeping into his cheeks.

Sue, at least, noted the hollowness of his voice as he said: "As I told you, this is a very naughty ring. So I will ask the gentlemen to investigate their pockets to see if this wayward trinket has wandered still farther from its course."

Sue registered alarm as she noted the eagerness with which her husband observed the efforts to locate the ring. She knew that something had gone amiss. And presently everybody there knew it also.

An uncomfortable silence preceded Barry's "I think we had better search about for it. Of course, you all know it's a trick and tricks are likely to go wrong now and then. I really do not know where the ring is."

Sue came to his side. "It 'll turn up. Let's go over the floor first."

Of the lot, Mrs. Cornwell appeared the least perturbed.

"Oh, it will turn up, as Mrs. Thomas says," she declared. "Let's not bother about it. If it's on the floor, the maid will find it and if it's clinging to any of you, you'll discover it when you get home. Please. Don't let's bother."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But they insisted on combing the floor, moving furniture. All to no avail.

Mrs. Cornwell caused fresh drinks to be served, but the party was shot. An atmosphere of uneasiness hung over the heads of all. Sue tried to reassure Barry, but the smile with which he met her efforts was forced and she looked with real pity at his white face.

The guests began to leave; there was nothing else to do.

Barry insisted on lingering when the others had gone. To their hostess he said: "I expect you will find the ring, Mrs. Cornwell. But if you don't, of course, I shall make it good to you."

"Rubbish!" she told him. "I wouldn't think of such a thing."

Barry ventured: "Was it—was it—a very valuable ring, if you don't mind telling me?"

"Not very," she replied. "Sixteen hundred, I believe. It's really nothing at all, Mr. Thomas, and I don't want you to think about it any more."

Barry was thankful that she could not see his throat go dry when she mentioned the amount.

All the way home he was silent, and Sue pitied him too much to chide him. But her lips were tightly compressed, and Barry did not fail to observe this when they at last reached their flat. Even her "It's bound to turn up, Barry," did not reassure him.

Barry got the money. He mortgaged his eternal soul to do it. One hundred a month and heavy interest was the rate at which he contracted to reimburse the loan shark who supplied the funds.

But a check for the amount went forward to Mrs. Cornwell—went forward with a most casual letter, a letter with a finality about it so that the lady protested only feebly over the telephone and accepted the money. Then Barry Thomas started to serve his time.

VI.

If ever a man was cured of anything, Barry Thomas was cured of parlor tricks. He staggered under the load of repayment. Sue went without new clothes. She said little, but Barry knew what she was feeling. Once or twice she stood over him, gravely watching while he wrote the monthly check to the loan company. On such occasions he squirmed.

Of course he had told her how sorry he was and she had assured him that it wasn't his fault, but the thing stood between them like a gaunt, accusing specter. Barry wondered if things ever would be the same again—after he had finished those damned payments.

Everything must come to an end. Thus the day for the last payment arrived. Sue was hovering about when Barry, with a sigh, sat down to write the final check.

Somehow, he did not mind having her present this evening. When he had signed his name and inclosed the slip of paper in the accompanying letter, he said: "Thank God, that's over Sue."

"Barry," she said, "I haven't criticized you all through these months, have I, dear?"

"No," he told her. "You have been marvelous, Sue! You have been wonderful, darling! I didn't deserve it."

"All right," she said. "Now I am going to speak plainly, Barry. I have a right to do that. For more than a year, you have steered clear of the line of stunts you always used to perform. And I don't mind saying that it's been worth it. Worth all it cost us. You never knew how I suffered, night after night, listening to the same words, the same monologue, watching you do over and over again the same footless tricks.

"And, in spite of all, I have been happier with you this last year than for the five that went before. Can't you understand, Barry?"

He was looking at her, a puzzled frown on his forehead. "Why—why—Sue—I never thought—I never realized—I—"

"Of course you never did," she cried; came suddenly across to him and gathered him in her arms. "I knew that, dear. But I didn't know how to tell you. Then this thing, this trouble—"

She looked into his worried eyes and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

laughed, drew back a little and said: "Why, Barry Thomas, I'm surprised at you!" Her fingers darted into his pocket. Then Mrs. Cornwell's ring flashed and glittered under the lights!

Barry's jaw sagged. "What on earth? Let me see!"

He reached for the ring. Sue stood over him, beaming.

"You see," she said, "meeting Mr. La Fitte gave me an idea. I told him about some of your tricks. I wanted to learn how you did them so I could expose you and spoil your game back here at home. Yes. That was what I meant to do. Mr. La Fitte said most of them were frightfully amateurish, especially the one you did that last night.

"He told me what to watch in that stunt, where to look for the article after it was covered by the cloth. Not only that, he taught me to do a little palming on my own account. Why, Barry, I practiced four and five hours a day, and Mr. La Fitte told me I was a mighty apt pupil.

"Anyhow, I had no trouble spotting you when you slipped the ring into that man's pocket just before we formed the circle. (I'd seen where the knife went.) And in the mixup, I found it no trouble at all to abstract it. You see, I had it all the time, and the best of it is that Sarah Cornwell was in on it, too. She cashed your check and turned the money over to me. Of course it hasn't been drawing the interest you have had to pay, but I guess we can stand the difference, can't we?"

He swooped down upon her. "You little devil! You mad child! But the ring! How do you happen to have that?"

"Oh!" she said. "I just borrowed it to make this evening more dramatic."

THE END

ʊ ʊ ʊ

AWAKENING

ALL my life has been in dreaming;
All the listless afternoons
I have sipped of poison lotus,
I have heard the piper's tunes.

Shining mountains rising golden
Hem our em'rald valley in,
And the breeze that stirs the peppers
Never chides us with: "Begin—"

In the shade of ancient olives,
I have watched a turquoise sky;
I have lived in silver shadows
While the toiling world went by.

But to-day, I rode the mesa,
Saw the sunlight in your hair—
And my soul awoke from sleeping
As I paused and worshiped there.

I am sick of silver shadows,
I shall leave my specters pale;
I would live, and serve a purpose:
Mine, to follow—yours, the trail.

H. A. Woodbury, Jr.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Spinning the Big Top

By A. T. LOCKE

CHAPTER XVIII (*Continued*).

RIDERS OF THE NIGHT.

HELL-BENT gave no reply. He leaped down on the opposite side of the wall, stooped low as he ran fleetly along an undulating path.

"Heads up, there, fellers!" he heard some one yell. "I just saw some one prowlin' around that wall!"

There was a further sound of excited voices, and then the soft thud of galloping hoofs pounding in his direction.

The runner veered away from the barrier to reach the deeper gloom of a near-by woods, and a shot broke the stillness of the the night.

"Stop!" came the command. "Stop—or I'll bring ye down!"

But the runner had no intention of stopping. He raced toward the woods; the horsemen would hardly risk leaping their mounts over the wall into the hilly tangle on his own side; they would have to gallop to the end of the wall, wherever it was, and hope to cut off his retreat.

"Surround the lot, fellers!" he heard some one shout, as he gained the shelter of the woods and hid himself in a thick growth of bushes.

As he lay there silently, brambles sticking into his back, he realized the mistakes of overconfidence. He could hear the searching horsemen riding about, comparing notes, and he realized that he was caught like a rat in a trap if they trailed him to the clumps of bushes.

He raised his head slightly and noted

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 6.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with alarm that there were flashlights in the searching party. The man in charge was evidently a determined chap, and would search every inch of the woods.

Hell-Bent waited until the flash lights gleamed on the opposite side of the planting, then, as quietly as possible, slipped from his hiding place and crossed a ditch to a rutty, winding road. He recalled that such a road led by the Lonsdale farm. His plans for trying to see Mary had been knocked galley-west. Lucky if he could remain undiscovered now, and retrace his steps to the shelter of the friendly Lonsdale barn. He broke into a run.

The rain had stopped completely; a moon that had been foiled during the earlier part of the evening, now managed to climb slowly but determinedly. He came to a crossroads—no, this was not the Lonsdale crossroads.

He stopped a moment to get his bearings, and heard the clop-clop of a horse's feet on the intersecting highway, and the rattle of carriage wheels. He considered asking the driver what time it was, and, in a roundabout, unsuspicious way, learn the location of the Lonsdale farm. The sheriff's party would be either in autos or on horseback; the person approaching would doubtless be some tired farmer returning from town.

Then an idea smote him sharply: At present he was lost and helpless, a suspicious character afoot, with a searching party liable to heave in sight at any moment.

He believed the horsemen could not have had a very clear idea of the way he was dressed; if he could catch a ride in a respectable buggy, would it not be the best kind of camouflage and protection? He'd try it.

First, though, he slunk back in the shadow of the crossroads mile-post to snatch a look at the occupant of the buggy which rattled along at a slow gait behind a limping, brindled-gray nag. An old man leaned forward wearily on the seat, the reins held limp in his hands. The brindled horse, evidently knowing its way home, turned into the rutted highway.

"Good evenin'." Hell-Bent hailed cheerily. "Mind givin' me a lift? I'm goin' your way."

"Whoa!" called the driver. "Who be ye?" The tone was suspicious.

Hell-Bent appoached the buggy. He was cudgeling his brain as to just what to say. Then he was grateful for his being slow of speech. The driver smiled. "So ye're one o' the college boys, are ye?" he asked. "Hop in. How is it y'ain't in Hamlin tonight? Saw a bunch o', ye, wearin' them sweaters. What I want to know is when you fellers is goin' to git through yellin' an' devilin', an' git down to dirt farmin'."

He was friendly, though, in a gruff way. Hell-Bent thanked his stars that he was in his costume, and not in his Western outfit, as the farmer was talkative to the point of garrulity on the greatest excitement that the country had known for an untold number of years, the menace of "that murderous Westerner."

Hell-Bent found himself pictured as a desperate "bad man," one who killed for the fun of the thing. Evidently Fernando and his henchmen had not failed to paint him in scarlet colors, as a means of vengeance, and, doubtless, that he might bear the brunt of any of their own depredations along the circus route.

He spoke little himself, but allowed the loquacious old man to volunteer much interesting information. He learned that the Agricultural College was only a few miles away, on the outskirts of Hamlin; that placards were posted throughout the vicinity offering a reward for the capture of himself and Archy; that there had been no performance of the circus in Hamlin that evening on account of the rain—the farmer himself was returning earlier than he had planned, having driven in to take in the circus. He smelt strongly of whisky. Sheriff Wiggin's efficiency, it seemed, was not being extended in the direction of drying up the county.

The farmer rattled on and on. "Yas," he recapitulated, "that circus feller's a bad 'un. Lots o' the country folk is goin' about armed. Ye see"—and a tricky light came into his eyes—"I ain't sech a fool myself. When ye hailed me back at the crossroads, I didn't even know who *you* was 'til I seen

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yer sweater. Jes had the least idear ye mighta been him. Course I stopped, figgerin' I couldn't git out o' the way very fast with this lame ole mare. But I was a-usin' my head ev'ry minute. I had this all ready."

He laughed, and reached to a pouch in the top of the buggy. "This" proved to be a revolver, of an ancient make but deadly appearance. Its usefulness was a matter of speculation.

Hell-Bent joined in the laugh, allowed that his companion was no fool. He breathed easier when the farmer reached back and placed the weapon again in the pouch.

Now that he was not pursued as a hare is pursued by hounds, but was sitting comfortably in a buggy free from suspicion, the cowboy used his practiced eye to recover his bearings. A strong, vinegary odor was scenting the air. The cider mill described by old Thad loomed up ahead. Hell-Bent realized that now, by some pretext, he could drop his new companion and with any kind of luck back-track to Lonsdale's without leaving any hint or trace of his hiding place. He was busying himself thinking up some logical reason for bidding his companion good night, when once more his ears caught an alarming sound—the thud of galloping hoofs on the highway behind them.

To depart abruptly now would be apt to excite suspicion. For once, he found himself in a quandary what to do. At least there was only one horseman; very likely he would drive by, or if he stopped and became curious, would be satisfied with the sight of a farmer and an agricultural student riding in a buggy; but if the worst came to the worst, could even be overpowered.

Keeping his garrulous companion talking, he reached back silently to the pouch in the buggy-top; his fingers closed on the handle of the revolver.

The hoofs beats grew louder; the rider was almost upon them, and there was no indication that the horse was being slowed down. The old farmer had guided his nag to the right side of the road. Hell-Bent looked over toward the left.

And then, out of the night, galloped Mary Curry, on her snow white high school horse.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BOARD OF STRATEGY.

MARY CURRY evidently paid no attention to strangers in the course of her night rides. She looked casually to her right at the occupants of the buggy, and speeded on. Already she was fading into the night.

Hell-Bent threw caution to the winds. Never mind the old farmer, or what he thought.

"Miss Curry!" he yelled after the receding hoof-beats. "Mary! Mary!" And then as the horsewoman showed no signs of pausing: "*Mary!* Stop a minute! Mary! *It's Hell-Bent Harrison!*"

The driver had turned and was looking at him strangely now, almost fearfully, he thought. He didn't care, at the moment. He was more interested in the sounds that he heard down the road—the sounds of the hoof-beats coming more slowly as the rider brought the horse to a halt.

He leaped to the ground. Out of the side of his eye he sensed that the farmer was reaching toward the pouch in the buggy top. Let him reach; Hell-Bent clutched the ancient weapon in his right hand as he raced on ahead.

Mary had turned her horse and was cantering back, slowly. An automatic gleamed in her hand.

"It's me, Miss Curry. It's Hell-Bent Harrison, Mary," he reassured her.

Mary greeted him warmly. "I was sure of your voice," she said, "and yet, when I saw those clothes, I thought I'd draw my gun. I passed some fresh college boys from that rural institution down the street. They yelled at me. At first I thought you were another of them. But tell me—you're all right, then? You're safe?"

"That's what I was scoutin' around to tell you," said the puncher. "I reckon I *was* safe, but I ain't so sure about it now. I was ridin' with that farmer back there, an' he heard me yell out who I was."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You take such chances!" Mary reprimanded him. "But you would, of course. Say, that farmer has turned around and gone back the other way."

It was true. The talkative one, having realized that he had been riding beside a Western "bad man," who had outwitted him and taken his revolver, was driving madly back toward Hamlin.

"I must talk to you a few minutes, anyhow," Hell-Bent insisted, and Mary was not difficult to convince. Back of the cider mill they found a lane, and led Silver Heels into the shelter of a willow tree which had its roots in a gurgling stream. The low ground on the banks of the creek proved an excellent place for a conference. There was no sound except their own whispers and an occasional sniff from Silver Heels as he cropped the lush grass.

Mary very quickly gave the news from the enemy camp. Fernando had called off the night performance, partly on account of the rain, partly because the show was pretty well on the rocks, she explained.

Reports had come to Hamlin about robberies all along the circus route, pocket picking, all sorts of crookery, worse than she had believed existed, although she had long since become disillusioned as to the nature of the outfit. Fernando had grasped the opportunity to blame it all on the missing Westerner. "Oh, I'm so sorry you got in such a mess, Mr. Harrison," she said.

"Well, I ain't a bit sorry," said the puncher, with a significant glance at Mary, "an' if you'd jes' as soon, ma'am, I ain't much used to this 'mister' business. Course, Hell-Bent ain't no name for a lady to say, but my other name is Bud, an'—"

"I'll call you Bud. And that means you'll call me Mary. Now, I must speak quickly, and you must get back to your hiding place. I owe the Fernando outfit no further loyalty. I'm quitting it at the first opportunity, but first I must get my salary.

"Fernando has been crying hard times and been holding back our money. I'll try to get it before I go; and then I know there's some further trickery afoot. If I could only find out what it is I believe it would help to clear you."

"Don't stay another minute, Mary. Never mind me."

"But I will mind you. Besides, I want to get even with Fernando, too," was the girl's claim. "I don't like to hate any one, but I'm afraid I hate Fernando. To-day he had the audacity to ask me to—to marry him."

Hell-Bent could contain his indignation no longer. "The slinkin' c'yote!" he said. "Sheriff or no sheriff, I'm goin' to sashay into Hamlin to-night an' run that varmint out o' town!"

"But no!" insisted Mary. "Oh, please—you'll only get caught. I can't see you put in prison. With the exception of Ed Hoover you were the only honest man with the outfit. I can't see an honest, upright man, one who can be trusted in any situation, one to whom I owe my life—"

She stopped abruptly, embarrassed at her praise of the man who stood beside her. And then, seemingly without the knowledge of either, without any set plan or preparation they were in each other's arms. There was no embarrassment on the part of either this time. The act had seemed the most natural thing in the world.

Hell-Bent was oblivious of everything save that he held in his arms a woman that he seemed to have been dreaming about forever, a beautiful woman, a good woman. Vaguely his mind wandered back to his own West where, out on the range, in some of his limited literature he had read of some heroine, something about a pure white lily with its roots in the mire. If Sheriff Wiggins's man-hunters had made a sortie on the willows at this moment, they would have found him, for once unprepared for strategy or battle.

But no one disturbed them. A motor hummed alone on the highway, but whether it was official or private, it did not stop.

Romance, however, had to give way to more practical procedure for the present, at least. Time was limited. Hell-Bent was in danger. Mary had a plan—a plan for the man of her choice to escape danger by going to the very heart of it.

With her head cradled on his shoulder she unburdened her fears and outlined her plan. Always bad enough, the Fernando

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

outfit was getting worse and worse. The tricky little owner was seen more and more in the company of the grifters, talking with them in low, mysterious tones, drinking with them. She had seen Weil, the chief grifter, Mel Hawkins, Rawlins, and two of the shillabers start off that day after a conference with Fernando. They were bound for Elmville, she had heard from Ed Hoover, the wagon-train man, although the circus was not due to play Elmville for nearly a week. Something was up, some villainy planned; some villainy, doubtless, that would be chalked against Hell-Bent.

"Now, you must have an alibi," she warned the cow-puncher. "You will have none back there in that barn. You don't want to drag in this Lonsdale man and perhaps get the poor old fellow in trouble. You must keep close to the circus. I have two friends there that I can trust—past experience has proved this to me. They are Sam, the mulatto, and Ed Hoover. Ed was with my father for years. He's only staying on to try to get his money. And Sam will do anything I say.

"The wagon train will reach Franklin, between here and Elmville, Thursday night. You can't risk discovery by sleeping in barns or freight cars. So I'll make arrangements with Hoover and Sam to have you and Archy sleep in the canvas wagons."

The details of the plan were quickly discussed. Hawkins and the grifters would not be about. Fernando usually left everything to Hoover on night jumps, and besides he was drinking heavily, and the circus would be the last place either he or the authorities would be apt to look for the fugitives.

"But, Mary, don't you think this meeting to-night may get you into trouble? That old farmer heard me calling after you?"

Mary drew the bridle reins over the head of Silver Heels. "Don't worry about me," she assured him. "It's known that we were acquainted. If there are any cross-examinations I'll say you stopped me and asked me for some money. Some day," she smiled, "I hope we can stop telling all these fibs."

"Some day," murmured Hell-Bent. "An' some day—"

"You must go now," Mary instructed. "Be extra careful. I'll be praying for your safe return. Plan to reach Franklin some time before midnight Thursday night. We play there Friday. Ed Hoover 'll be on the lot—it's right opposite the railroad tracks—and I'll see that he's on the lookout. Good night."

Only Silver Heels heard the kiss, and while he was a highly educated high school horse he could be depended upon not to talk.

CHAPTER XX.

ARCHY TAKES THE LEAD.

IT was with unusual caution that Hell-Bent made his return trip to the Lonsdale farm. Once he stretched himself flat in the brackish water of a ditch as he heard a motor approaching, and remained there until the sound of the car died away; before leaping stone walls or fences he carefully peered over them. One lesson had been enough.

The light was out in the Lonsdale farmhouse upon his return, but he found a lantern and a box of safety matches just inside the stable door. Archy was stretched out comfortably in the loft, wrapped in a blanket and a snoreful slumber. "I'll let him sleep," said Hell-Bent to himself. "I can give him the news in the morning."

Then, as Archy continued his sonorous breathing in the snug loft, the puncher became aware of a fruity, alcoholic odor.

"The loco galoot!" he muttered. "I'll bet he's been lushin' it while I been gone."

He dug the toe of his boot into the ex-hobo's ribs, and roused him unceremoniously.

"Hey!" objected Archy, sitting up and blinking. "What the—"

"You been drinkin'!" Hell-Bent accused. "A fine pard you are! Takin' to that p'isonous red-eye to steal away what little sense you got, jes' when we need all we got between us. You shore gotta lot o' emotional stamina," he charged, with deep satire, "to forget Mam'zelle Dazie's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

advice so quick. I've a good mind to drop you."

Archy sobered up under the invective of his partner. "Aw, I just took a coupla snorts," was his alibi. "It was rainin' an' kinda chilly, an' Thad brought out a demi-john o' apple whisky. He wanted to be sociable. I couldn't offend him by refusin', could I? An' I guess that mam'zelle's too high-toned for me. I may never get to see her again, even."

"That's where yo're plumb wrong. We are j'inin' the circus again Thursday night. I made all arrangements this evenin'."

Archy looked up in wonderment. "We are? Then they ain't got anything against us no more?"

They got plenty ag'in' us. But that circus is the one place the sheriff an' his gang won't think o' rustlin' for us. Ye see, Arch, to avoid danger, go to the very heart of it." He was quoting from Mary's phrase of earlier in the evening. "You'll do as I say, pard. Any hombre as weak in the noodle as you are, drinkin' an' all with the sheriff on our trail, has jes' gotta be driv' like a yearlin' calf."

But Archy had his revenge a few moments later. A soft step was heard on the hay-carpeted floor below.

"Oh, you're back!" said a gushing, girlish voice. "Goodness! I was so worried. Oo-ooh! I hope you didn't get soaked all through!"

Alta had climbed the ladder, and was feeling of Hell-Bent's saturated clothes.

"You poor man!" she sympathized. Quite unexpectedly she reached up and kissed the Westerner on the cheek. "You must wrap yourself nice and warm in the blanket," she counseled. "I'll get you some new clothes in the morning."

After she had gone Archy had his innings. "You're a nice 'un to gab about this here emotional stamina," he twitted. "Ridin' with the calliope girl one minute, an' ravin' about the señorita the next, an' then kissin' this sweet girl graduate."

Hell-Bent made no defense. It seemed unchivalrous to make the claim that the girl had been the aggressor. He blushed under Archy's guffaws, wrapped himself in his blanket, and blew out the lantern.

He met Alta's gaze bashfully when she appeared the next morning with breakfast. The girl, however, was as gushing as ever. She objected strenuously when she heard Hell-Bent confide to Thad the plans for his departure on Thursday night. She had come to look upon the strapping Hell-Bent with an air of proprietorship. But Thad, while urging his guest to remain as long as he liked, saw the advantage of the new plan.

"Ye'll have to ditch them clothes," he said, "since ye tipped yer hand to that feller in the buggy. I'll bet it was ole Sim Humphrey, the talkin'est ole fool in this caounty. An' I'll keep yer animals fer ye; ye dassent think o' takin' them with the roads an' fields alive with Wiggins's men. I'll have the Demmycrat wagon ready by Thursday night."

Archy, however, was fruitful of ideas, hoping, perhaps, to live down his apostasy of the night before.

"You've done enough for us, Mr. Lonsdale," he objected. "It's time I done somethin' for the cause. This town o' Franklin is on the railroad, you say?"

"On the Short Line. Only two trains a day, though."

"Any at night?"

"One of 'em. There's a big cannin' fact'ry at Franklin. Right now the up-country farmers is usin' the railroad to run their cannin' stuff down there."

"Then watch your little pal here," said Archy proudly. "Say, I ain't 'boed thousands o' miles to let any little Short Line road lick me. We can get the rattler when she's comin' up a grade. I'll engineer this deal. I s'pose Hell-Bent's a rank amachoor at the game, but he'll have a perfessor tellin' him how an' givin' him the fine points. Watch me!"

Alta brought Hell-Bent another outfit of her brother's clothes the following day, but he refused to make use of them and insisted upon getting back into his own Western garb.

"I feel at home in these," he explained. "They're more natural-like, an' I reckon I can run as fast in these as in anything."

He did not explain, however, that his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

real motive in returning to his own clothes was the unconscious disapproval that Mary had shown when they had met the night before. He was determined not to look like a fresh dude collegian.

As the time came for them to depart, Mrs. Lonsdale brought them a neatly packed lunch.

"It's just like startin' off on a Sunday-school picnic," Archy commented, after the old couple finally bade them good-by and retired for the night.

That the parting between Alta and Hell-Bent was most touching was indicated by the fact that Archy's eyes were full of tears—tears of laughter. Alta tiptoed into the barn just as they were about to leave. Without paying the slightest attention to Archy, who, it was very probable, she never really had noticed, Alta went straight to Hell-Bent and put her arms around him.

"My great, big, wonderful man!" she exclaimed, lingering for awhile on each adjective.

Hell-Bent thought he heard a snicker back in the shadows, and his face turned rather red in the glow of the light. He smiled down at Alta because there seemed to be nothing else to do.

"You do love me, don't you?" she sighed, and again Hell-Bent thought he heard a suppressed snort from the direction where Archy was waiting. He was annoyed and silent, and Alta repeated her question in a pleading tone.

"Shore," he replied, with an air of great determination, "but right now I aim to catch a train."

"But promise me that you'll come back to me some day, Hell-Bent, that when your wanderings are over, when you have nobly vindicated yourself, you will seek me out."

Hell-Bent reckoned that he might, and then the scene of parting was broken up by Archy, who crudely injected himself into the foreground.

"That train you gotta catch if you want to vindercate yourself 'll be rollin' past in a few minutes," he cautioned. "It must be 'bout two mile to the tracks, an' we gotta be careful how we go, an' we gotta mooch aroun' for a steep grade."

Hell-Bent welcomed the interruption.

The train labored up the steep grade; its headlight sprayed streaks of light over the bushes where they lay concealed; then there was darkness again.

"Every car sealed," Archy muttered, "an' we can't ride the bumpers. We gotta take to the rods, pal. All right, she's nearly at the top now. We'll make her while she's puffin' along slow. Stoop down, grab them rods underneath, hold on tight an' lay on your belly. Here, I'll go first. Do just as I do, cull."

He scurried alongside of the slowly moving freight, stooped low, reached under, and was jerked out of sight.

"O. K.," he yelled. "Take the next car."

For the first time in his life Hell-Bent felt an emotion that was akin to fear. He had not figured on the necessity of taking to the rods. However, he imitated Archy's movements, grasped the rods and was jerked under. "Sufferin' c'yotes!" he muttered, as he felt himself slipping, then gripped the rods desperately. It was not until now that he gained an idea of Archy's sensations after first mounting the trick mule.

As the summit of the grade was reached, however, his fears gradually subsided. There was a stop at a water tank a few miles farther on, and a form glided under his own car and noiselessly clambered to the rods.

"When she gets started again," cautioned Archy—for it was he—"don't let the hum o' the train lull you to sleep. Plenty o' 'boes is killed that way. They doze off an' get ground to pieces."

Hell-Bent made no reply to this warning. Sleep! "Good Lord!" he thought. "Any hombre that could sleep here could sleep in a nest o' rattlers!"

He was wondering whether he would rather be in jail or where he was, when, toward dawn, the train pulled into a station.

A sign reading, "Franklin—Yard Limits," told them that they were at their destination. They climbed out, and through the darkness could hear the clacking of the circus vans backing into position on a vacant lot nearly opposite the station.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The clank of chains, the hoarse oaths of the drivers, and a multitude of other sounds which they had learned to identify left no doubt in their minds. They could see figures moving through the gloom, and realized that many Franklinites had come down to see the arrival of the show and watch the erection of the tents.

Hell-Bent stretched his cramped legs. "Archy," he said, "we gotta jine that show agin, an' dawg-gone it, we gotta do more'n ride a mule to get in it this time."

"You said it," replied Archy dolefully.

CHAPTER XXI.

RISKY BUSINESS.

"THIS ain't no place to be moonin' around," Archy warned. "It 'll be light in no time now, an' this is about the finest place in the world to run into some disagreeable brakey or railroad dick. I piloted you here," he proudly reminded Hell-Bent. "Now what's the lay?"

"Follow me," Hell-Bent announced as he removed his telltale hat and crumpled it into a pocket. There was an open space between the tracks and the lot; the townspeople swarmed about through this area, but there was nothing for them to do but make a sortie for the circus and depend upon their luck, which, so far, had been conspicuously good, to reach it without causing too much comment.

They strode out boldly in the direction of the long row of wagons. If they could reach Ed Hoover before the morning light betrayed them, everything would be all right. The loitering and curious villagers seemed to be whispering as they passed. Archy was perspiring copiously until he overheard one of the remarks.

"I bet that's the owner," said one youngster in a voice in which awe and reverence were mingled.

"He means me," Archy asserted. "These clothes make me look like a millionaire.

Keeping a weather eye out for Fernando's pudgy form, they circled around, and finally descried the tall form of Ed Hoover. The wagon train man was shouting at a stake-and-chain gang. He seemed to be on the lookout; when he turned he indicated that he saw them by waving a hand in their direction, then they heard his deep voice commanding the gang to go over and help the canvasmen.

Once the men were on their way he eased over toward Hell-Bent and Archy, and beckoned them between two wagons.

"I guess ye caught the train all right," he said. "Ye look black enough to be Sam's brothers. Guess ye didn't ride in no parlor car."

"Had my first trip on the rods—an' my last!" Hell-Bent told him.

Hoover laughed. "Ye got yer nerve with ye," he said. "Mary got worried, afraid somethin' happened. It's jest as well, though, way things has turned out. There sure was some carousin' aroun' here earlier in the night. Never see the like of it. Looks like this show is goin' on the rocks, double-quick. Fernando an' Rawlins is over in a tent there, sleepin' off a drunk. Well, I got a reg'lar dugout to hide you guys in. This is it."

He motioned to one of the wagons which screened them. It was an ornate vehicle which, in the more prosperous days of the circus, had been used as a conveyance for animals.

Its boarded red-and-gold sides were now battered, and the paint and gilt badly flaked. Hoover explained that it was used for various odds and ends of paraphernalia which commonly were not used, but which were worth too much to junk.

"There's a lot of old side-show equipment in there," he said, "that nobody ever pays no attention to. Mary an' me doped out this as 'bout the best hide-out. The wagon locks. I got the only key to it, an' I'll see that nobody pays any attention to it from now on."

He unlocked the rear door. "Better climb in," he urged. "It 'll be light in a few minutes. Ye'll be as safe as a church in there, an' I'll tip off Mary that ye've come, an' see that Sam smuggles ye some grub. Don't do any loud talkin' an'—"

A cluster of exploring villagers could be heard approaching. Hoover pantomimed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that speed in getting into the wagon would be necessary. They scrambled in, and Hoover shut the door and padlocked it.

"A nice trap," Archy whispered. "I hope this Hoover feller's O. K."

"Mary's judgment's right good enough for me, pard," said Hell-Bent. "Besides, it beats them rods all holler."

"I'm havin' it tugged over to the vacant side o' the lot," they heard Hoover say. A few minutes later they were conscious of being ridden over the uneven ground of the lot. Then it grew quiet, except for the subdued bustle and clatter at the other end of the grounds.

As the first streaks of dawn stole down through the little grille at the end of the wagon, they looked about the interior of the vehicle which was at once asylum and prison.

A mangy suit of hair lay sprawled out like a man in one corner, probably the camouflage of some former "wild man" of the circus. The fifth leg of a "five-legged calf" stuck out from a mass of tinselly but bedraggled costumes; a few celluloid masks, some of them cracked or broken, were strewn about the floor, and there were divers other articles of the land of fakery and make-believe.

"A spooky place to take a flop," was Archy's comment.

And yet, tired out from the nervous train ride of the night before, they spread themselves out for a brief nap. "Easy on that snorin' of yourn, pard," Hell-Bent warned.

The pair were awakened by a light tapping against the rear door; in a minute or so there was the sound of a key against the padlock, and Sam's grinning face was thrust in before them as the door swung open.

"Gotta make it quick, gents," he said cautiously, as he pushed in a package and hastily closed and locked the door again. The package contained odds and ends of food and a note from Mary. Hell-Bent stood up to catch a maximum of light from the little grille as he read it.

"That girl's an ace," he told Archy. "She says she can't get to talk to us, 'cause Fernando an' his gang might suspicion somethin', but she's willin' to take a ride with me to-night, an' she's made all arrangements, she says. I wonder what hoss she's a-gettin' for me."

He learned what horse it was later in the morning. Fernando and Rawlins chose a spot near the wagon for a comparison of notes. That they selected this apparently deserted spot convinced Hell-Bent that there was some conspiracy afoot. He pressed his ear to the side of the wagon and listened closely, motioning Archy to maintain absolute silence.

"Yeh, the horse an' mule was found wanderin' along the road up near Valesburg," he heard the circus owner say. "Some old hick named Lonsdale found 'em an' turned 'em over to the sheriff. I sent Sam over to git 'em."

"No trace o' the riders?"

"Naw," Fernando replied. "An' I'm damned glad of it. They've made a git-away by this time." He laughed raucously. "Out o' the way just in time, too," he added. "We can give that big Western guy credit for the big explosion when it comes. Ev'rything's runnin' perfect, Red. Couldn't be better."

CHAPTER XXII.

PROMOTERS IN ELMVILLE.

THE Grangers Hotel in the pleasant little town of Elmville was a three-story frame structure standing in the middle of the business block of the community. Running along in front of it was a broad veranda, shaded by arching elms, and screened, for the greater part of its length, by a fragrant, blossoming clematis vine.

Directly across the street was the new stone building of Potter's Bank, the only repository in the village. Next to the bank was the post office, which occupied space on the ground floor of the Potter Block. An arched sign over the main entrance bore the inscription "Potter's Hall," indicating that the upper floor was very probably used for dances, lodge meetings and kindred functions.

Next to the post office was a vacant

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

store. The dusty, empty windows were plastered with gaudy three-sheets and one-sheets which broadcast the important announcement that Fernando's Peerless Circus —an aggregation of marvels from many lands—would appear on Foster's Flats in Elmville on the following Saturday for the entertainment and education of the people of the community.

A little farther down the street was a twenty-four-sheet stand in a vacant lot containing, among other things, the picture of a beautiful girl on a beautiful milk-white horse.

A little group of men were standing on the veranda of the hotel. Two of them had suit cases in their hands, and, apparently, were about to take their departure. They were well-dressed, shrewd-looking men, although the larger man had the florid complexion often resulting from overindulgence in liquor, and the eyes of the other, the younger of the pair, were sharp and ferret-like.

The men were Weil and Mel Hawkins, who had been in Elmville looking the place over on the pretense of representing capitalists who might establish a large canning factory in the town. They rather enjoyed the new experience of having the solid citizens of a community playing up to them.

"Of course it isn't the county seat, true enough," admitted Mr. Potter, the banker, who was evidently giving the final sales arguments as to the benefits of Elmville above all other places for a canning factory, "but at that, about the only thing in Valesburg is the office of the sheriff and the county jail. Elmville is proud of *not* having those. Elmville is noted for law and order. There is never any disturbance here."

"Mr. Potter is right," said Foran, the head of the local boosters, to whom, of course, Mr. Potter was always right, since he practically controlled the little community. "Our whole police force numbers only eight men, four day and four night, and there's seldom an arrest. It's true that Franklin has a canning factory, but we could take the play right away from that. The roads into Franklin are bad. Our roads are our pride, our town keeps 'em up, not the county, and the farmers for miles around could double their crops if there was a ready outlet for 'em. I tell you, Mr. Flint, Franklin has always run a poor second to Elmville."

He pointed to the brilliant posters about the town. "Y' notice that this circus wants to be in Elmville for the big night, Saturday night. Even they've heard where the money is."

Mr. Flint—otherwise Mel Hawkins—nodded. "I hear that's a good show," he said.

The hotel-keeper, a pudgy little man, broke into the conversation. "I heard different," was his claim. "They say that's a pretty tough outfit. If they want any accommodation in my house, they'll pay in advance, and pay well."

"Oh, I understand a couple o' crooks got mixed up with 'em in Valesburg," Weil, now known as Mr. Jennings, admitted. "We heard about it in Franklin, when we looked over that town. Those criminals just happened to join up with the circus to cover up some dirty work o' theirs. I happened to meet this Fernando, the owner, I think he is. Seemed to be a good, honest fellow. Banking facilities good here, I suppose, Mr. Potter?"

Potter was on his favorite subject. "Best in the country," was his claim. "You see, this town taps a mighty prosperous region. You'd be surprised at the deposits made in my bank, even with marketing facilities not as favorable as they might be. Every farmer hereabouts has at least a Ford, their sons go to the Agricultural College, or some school in Chicago or the East. Plenty of money and prosperity here, Mr. Jennings."

"Plenty of prosperity," echoed Foran, the booster.

"Well, we'll look over Franklin again," said Weil. "Very probably we'll return here in a couple of days and make some final decision. We can't hurry it too much, of course. A factory such as we plan would probably employ over a hundred hands, easily, during the busy season. Yes, almost two hundred."

Mr. Potter obliged with a further monologue about Elmville prosperity, his bank, and the administration of the town. Mr.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Foran agreed to the final period of his superior's discourse. When Weil and Hawkins took the noon train to Franklin, they knew all they wanted to know, thanks to Mr. Potter and his talkative "yes" man.

Hell-Bent and Archy were confined to their restricted quarters during the day, but in spite of this they became aware of a couple of important developments. In addition to being told by Sam that he had returned the horse and the mule to the circus, they saw, early in the evening, that Hawkins and Weil were on the grounds again.

Petty grifting had evidently been suspended as lean pickings compared to some bigger deal afoot. That precious pair had stopped right near the wagon to refresh themselves out of a bottle of gin which, even then, was three-quarters empty. The conversation was carried on in low tones, and the two prisoners were able only to catch a fugitive word here and there.

They heard several references to Elmville, Potter's Bank, and the post office. They also heard the grifters refer to a clean-up and a getaway, the latter being connected in some way with a high-powered car.

"They're prancin' around all right to pull a big job in Elmville an' then make a getaway," averred Hell-Bent. "An' we'll go right along with 'em, right in this here cage, an' be all ready to step out at the proper time.

"Yeah," agreed Archy. "Us two-legged gazooks 'll be awful quiet till the times comes to make a noise, an' then we'll roar like hyenas."

Hell-Bent was offended at Archy's lack of knowledge of natural history. "Hyenas laugh," he corrected. "They don't roar. Try to remember that."

The check-up suited Archy perfectly. "Well, won't we laugh?" he asked. "You bet we will, cull, an' we'll let Fernando an' his crooks roar. Gee, but these quarters is cramped. We can't even growl like the rest o' the animals."

He sprawled out dejectedly. From the distance came the shouts of the barkers and the applause of the audience.

"Yeah," Hell-Bent agreed. "I shore wouldn't admire this here sort o' life. Reckon if we got caught they'd send us to jail, Arch."

Arch looked up with a look of mock surprise. "Oh, ain't you smart, cull?" he asked satirically. "To jail? Why, we'd get ten years in the pen, sure."

"I'll lay you a big bet we don't," said Hell-Bent, resolutely. "There ain't nobody goin' to lasso me an' corral me when I ain't done nothin'."

Archy, as a result of his contact with the dregs of life, had developed rather a judicial temperament, a habit of looking at both sides of a question, more often the seamier side.

"Ain't done nothin'," he exclaimed with deep sarcasm. "If you ain't done nothin', then what's somethin'? You've drawed your gun all over this here county; you beat it from a sheriff that tried to sling you in the hoosegow; you stole a horse—hey, what's the matter, anyhow?"

Hell-Bent had risen to his feet and was looking in a threatening manner at his partner.

"Don't call me no horse thief, Archy," he commanded. "I ain't no low crook like that. I had to have a horse, an' I took it, but don't think I'd keep it. When I'm through with that animal I'll turn it in again."

Archy looked amazed. "What if you did steal a horse—that ain't nothin' accordin' to my way o' thinkin'."

It was Hell-Bent's turn to look astounded. "Ain't nothin'!" he gasped. "Say, if Old Man Moses knowed anything about hosses, that 'ud been the first comman'ment. I'm beginning to reckon y'ain't got no morals at all, whatever, Arch. Gosh! You're plumb hopeless."

He considered the matter seriously for a moment. "Maybe takin' that hoss did look bad—I reckon if we got caught I mighta got strung up for that. But the rest o' the things— Shucks! They're nothin' but play, that no man could hold agin a man."

He continued to lecture Archy on the baseness of horse stealing. From his Western viewpoint it appeared to be all the seven

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deadly sins rolled into one. Archy began to be glad that he had never taken a horse during his rambles in the West.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BRIDGE AT MIDNIGHT.

LATE in the evening Sam came and leaned against the wagon for a moment, and knocked softly to get the attention of the occupants. Hell-Bent peered cautiously over one of the little side grilles, and, seeing Sam, indicated that he was listening. Sam, keeping his back to the wagon and looking carelessly out over the grounds, whispered that he had seen Mary, that she had asked him to convey the message that she might be late in her tryst that night.

All arrangements had been made to have Hell-Bent's horse ready, Sam explained. Mary had a special reason for wanting to see him and have a long talk with him. At the proper time Ed Hoover would appear with the key and liberate the puncher.

The hours wore away, and Hell-Bent and Archy could catch glimpses of the crowds leaving after the night performance. The flares commenced to dot the grounds, and, through the tiny gratings, they could see the canvasmen at work.

The big top was coming down, as well as the smaller tents. They would disappear as though beneath the wand of a magician, and the following day would spring up as though by some enchanter's spell. There was a metallic rasping outside, and the door was cautiously opened. "Make it snappy," Big Ed Hoover urged Hell-Bent. "Here's the key," he added, after the puncher had slipped out and locked the door again.

He found Sam at the appointed place with his horse. The mulatto explained that he would be there to take the horse upon its return. Hell-Bent was not unmindful of the fact that the situation was not without danger; he might very possibly run into some one who would recognize them or be suspicious of his identity. He believed, however, that the pursuit had been abandoned, or, if not, still centered more about Valesburg or close to the Lonsdale farm, where the animals had been found.

He determined to be extra careful. At the trysting place agreed upon, a little wooden bridge, he led his horse down to the creek bed and hid beneath the little span.

Time slowly passed; occasionally a car or a rig rumbled over the bridge; then, after what seemed an interminable period, he heard the hoof-beats of a horse. He kept himself concealed until he made out the white horse and its rider in the moonlight, then stepped quietly out where Mary could see him. She guided her animal beneath the bridge, and slipped quickly from its back.

"I knew you'd be nervous," she panted. "I'm pretty late, but there's a good reason for it. They're going to try to rob the bank and post office at Elmville tomorrow night," she told him breathlessly, "and then Fernando and his gang are going to make a get-away and leave the circus flat!

"I got Ed Hoover to drill a hole in the floor of the office wagon to-day," she hurried on, "and I crept under it to-night and listened. The four of them were in there, Fernando, Weil, Hawkins, and Rawlins, and all were drinking, and I could hear every word they said. Ed just threw a paper over the hole he made. I even hung on after the wagon started, and I waited until I heard all I needed to hear. Sam had my horse ready and I came to you as fast as I could.

"Now, you ride back alone when we get through making our plans. You can get back into the wagon. Ed 'll lock it. You'll go straight in to Elmville with the outfit. Ed 'll tip off the Elmville authorities at the right time to catch this gang of crooks redhanded. We'll prove, before the thing happens, that you have been in the wagon. Ed and Sam and I can swear to your presence, and I'll have a couple of deputies see you there, too, or maybe some prominent citizen of Elmville. I guess our troubles are pretty nearly over, Bud."

It looked very much that way to Hell-Bent, especially when he held the girl in his arms before he took his leave. An hour

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

later, when he was back and locked in the wagon, he tried to spirit up Archy, whose morale was breaking under the confinement.

"Jes' another day or so, pal," he comforted. "Then we rakes in the pot, pard. Jes' hold out, pard, jes' hold out."

"What I want more'n anything," said Archy, "is a shave an' a bath. I wanta be lookin' like a sheik when I meet that mam'zelle party. Gee! While you're traipsin' over the country with *your* girl, I'm here lookin' outa this cage like a monkey. I ain't seen no trace o' *my* girl. Say, pal, gi' me the makin's. I gotta have one smoke—me nerves is all shot."

"Then get yore sleep," Hell-Bent advised. "We wanta be pert when our innin's come."

He stretched himself out on a crumpled mass of costumes. A few minutes later he awoke with a start; the wagon was on the move; was evidently rolling along the highway toward Elmville. Archy was quiet, probably sleeping.

Hell-Bent sat up; there was a peculiar choking sensation in his throat. He sniffed suspiciously, and at the same instant a cluster of the inflammable contents of the wagon burst into a thin flame. He wondered who was driving. Anyhow, it behooved him to stamp out that flame whether he was heard or not.

"Archy!" he said in a stage whisper. "Quick! The place is afire!"

Celluloid masks, false beards, the bright tinselly costumes, were making excellent fuel. The smoke became almost overpowering, then a larger flame lit up the interior of the wagon and showed Arch's horrified face. "Help!" he yelled. "Fire!"

The wagon stopped. Some one jumped from the driver's seat, and they heard the booming voice of Big Ed Hoover.

"Damn it!" he said. "That's one thing I meant to tell ye about. Try to stamp it out in there. Mary's got the key!"

"Fire!" they heard some one in the wagon train shout. They hustled to pile the débris in one corner of the wagon, and gingerly danced about on it.

Hell-Bent had taken a large piece of canvas and was trying to smother the blaze. They could hear the voice of Fernando now. Their adventure was ending in a complete fiasco. Archy, half in fear, half in remorse at having been the cause of their misfortune, was frantically stamping about the little cell, but the fire was gaining.

With parched throats and watery eyes, the two stretched their necks up toward the little grille at the top of the wagon, and took deep breaths of the clean night air. Hell-Bent threw his weight against the rear door of the wagon. It seemed as solid as granite.

"Just a second!" yelled an excited feminine voice. There was a metallic rattling, Mary flung open the door and the prisoners, coughing and sputtering, tumbled out to the ground. The opened door acted as a chimney flue. The wagon burst into a solid mass of crackling flames, illuminating the road for several yards.

Fernando let out a curse. "C'mon, Hawkins!" he yelled. He carried a whip in his hand, and, reversing it, brought the loaded end down in the direction of Archy's head. But Archy, skilled in the ways of the ring, dodged quickly, and when the crook rushed him again, caught him coming in with a straight right to the jaw and sent him crumbling to the roadway.

Hell-Bent was busy with Rawlins and Hawkins, garroted the former and threw him into the ditch, caught the latter with a powerful roundhouse swing.

Fernando gathered himself up with a groan, and retreated. "Hey, Hoover!" he yelled. "Lend a hand here. Get these crooks!"

Big Ed rushed in and sent the circus owner to the turf again. "I'll get one of 'em!" he said, grimly. "Ye damned, thievin' holdout."

At this development, Hawkins and Rawlins fled incontinently.

"Sam!" yelled Mary. "Sam! Have you got 'em?"

"Hyah! Hyah!" Sam responded. He entered the arcs of light leading the horses of Hell-Bent and Mary, and Archy's mule.

"If we can get the first story to Elmville we might be able to fix matters," she panted. "Let's get started."

The three mounted and started to gallop along the Elmville Road. Mary and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hell-Bent speeded along, occasionally waiting in a shadowed part of the road for Archy to catch up with them. But the telephone proved to be speedier than their mounts. Galloping along an aisle of elms that bordered the road they were startled by a shot.

"It's too late," said Mary as they continued to speed on. "They've been busy on the phone, got in the first word. We can't take the chance of going any farther. Let's get off the road and take to the woods."

"But you can't come, Mary," Hell-Bent demurred. "You must ride into Elmville slow. You can't be mixed up in this."

"Can't I?" asked Mary. "Well, I guess I can. I wouldn't go back to that circus for a fortune. Once we give these hunters the slip, maybe I can walk in to town tomorrow and tip off the authorities. But right now we've got to hide out. It's no use having right on our side if these manhunters are going to shoot before we can explain."

The trio turned through a broken fence and cantered toward a clump of trees, a dark patch in the distance.

"It's a shame!" said Mary. "Just when we were on the edge of victory. How did that fire start?"

Archy hung his head. Hell-Bent looked over at his faithful, if injudicious, partner.

"Hard tellin', Mary," he said. "Reckon it must 'a' been sorter spontaneous combustion."

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORE CHANCES.

As dawn came up over the hills, it disclosed a more or less discouraged trio encamped in a thick cluster of willows and sycamores. Archy had foraged for food, returning with a pair of chickens. "Don't ask me where I got 'em," he requested. "We gotta eat."

"I'm afraid we're getting in deeper and deeper," said Mary. "I think I ought to start in toward Elmville now. My word ought to be as good as Fernando's."

Hell-Bent, however, seemed fearful of the girl's welfare. "This is a better hideout than we'll ever find agin," he argued. "I reckon we could stay here all day without discov'ry. Darkness has been our friend, so far. If I was you I'd wait till night, Mary. Then Arch an' me 'll sorter *es*-cort ye in toward the edge o' town."

Somehow, here in the midst of danger, he seemed calm and happy. He looked forward to a full day with Mary. Let anything come to-morrow; at least, he would have the girl's companionship for a day.

The day proved to be a mixture of happiness and fear. Once, peering out from their thicket, they saw a group of horsemen riding through the fields about two hundred yards away. Shortly after noon Archy, from a thickly foliaged tree a few yards from the highway, saw the wagons of the Fernando outfit rumbling along toward Elmville. Apparently they would not reach there in time to set up for the matinée.

As the evening shadows crept down into the camping place, the trio were startled by the appearance of a barefooted boy with a stick, who was driving a cow in from pasture. The boy stared out of startled blue eyes, then turned and ran. It was apparent that he knew who they were. Regretfully they mounted their horses and rode farther into the hinterland.

It was quite dark when Mary, flanked by Hell-Bent and Archy, started toward Elmville. Progress was slow. The rumble of every wheel, the sound of every voice, along the road, sent them scurrying to cover. There was one sound, however, which Mary hailed with delight. A lilting whistled tune sounded down the highway.

"That's Sam!" she announced. "No one else can whistle just like that, and I'll bet he's walking along whistling, knowing that I'd recognize it if I heard it. I'll bet he's looking for us, and has something of importance to tell us."

This proved to be the case. Sam ambled along, whistling loudly. He grinned happily when the fugitives scrambled out from their hiding place and disclosed themselves.

"That's what Ah was hopin' for," he said. "Ah jus' had to see yo'-all. A fahmer tel'foamed in that his boy got trace

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

o' yo'-all. 'Tain't no time fo' yo' to be showin' yo'selves. Fe'nando's got ev'ything set, an' mah advice 'd be to git back to them ponies an' jus' streak it."

After they had heard the mulatto's story, they realized the wisdom of his counsel. The advertising of Fernando, the lying billboards and the excitement of the fire and the escape of the supposed bandits had created no end of discussion and varied kinds of publicity.

Swarms of Elmville folk had turned out for the evening performance, but had become restive as the show continued. They had seen nothing that had been advertised on the billboards, and were disgusted at the paucity of the show. There had been booing and cries of "Fake!" and many had stormed the ticket wagon and demanded their money back.

Fernando himself, realizing that the circus was at a loose end, did not even bother himself to appear in the ring. Sam had learned that he had conferred with the Elmville authorities, and had advised them to send their entire police force after the "bandits."

"But can't you get to some of the authorities?" asked Mary in desperation.

"Lawd!" replied Sam. "Theah ain't no autho'ities lef' in Elmville. Theah out lookin' foh yo'-all. An' they wouldn't b'lieve some no-'count niggah boy nohow. Ah do wish yo'd take to them ponies, Miss Mary. Mebbe yo' could ride into some othah town. Yo'll git caught shuah if yo' try to git to Elmville."

Sam painted a depressing picture. It was finally agreed to return to the clump of willows where the horses were hobbled, make the best of their way to any village but Elmville, and try to get word to the latter town that there was a conspiracy against it by Fernando.

Once more on horseback and Sam on his way back to Elmville to do what he could toward foiling the robbers, Mary led the way to the highway, and turned toward Franklin. "If we run into the searching party now, so much the better," she said. "We'll just give ourselves up and warn them against what's planned for Elmville. Then when they find out that what we say is so, that you two aren't in on it, we can explain everything."

"I reckon yo're right," conceded Hell-Bent.

Archy cantered along, shifting from one side of the other on Jenny to ease his galled limbs.

"Anything's right," he said, "that 'll get me offa this here mule. I never wanta see a mule again as long's I live."

They were riding along a twisting road, a wooded cliff on one side, a rail fence plastered with lithographs on the other. As they came to the turn, four men, with drawn revolvers, rushed out from the shelter of the fence. A farmer cradling a shotgun in his arms and followed by a barefoot boy—the boy of the pasture—followed in their wake.

"The jig's up this time," said one of the men as he pointed his revolver straight at Hell-Bent. "You're all covered this time."

The trio halted their animals. "We know it," said Mary calmly. "We were looking for you."

"Ain't she got the nerve, though?" the leader guffawed. "Lookin' for us. Ain't that sweet? Well, you've found us. You folks ain't dealin' with ole bandy-legged Ed Wiggins now. Go ahead, men."

Hell-Bent and Archy, their explanation cut short, were bound with ropes.

"Whether you shoot or not," said Hell-Bent, grimly, "I aim to tell you gents one thing, an' that is that this gal ain't got no charge ag'in' her. She rode away to get out o' the clutches of a bunch o' crooks."

"An rode away with a coupla honest men like you," reported the leader, grinning. "Well, we won't handcuff the lady, but she rides in with us to Franklin."

"Oh, please! Not to Franklin," pleaded Mary. "I wanted to explain. I—"

"It's the nearest town," said the leader. "I ain't takin' no chances. I'll get these birds under cover, then they can be transferred to the county jail in Valesburg. Ed Wiggins 'll have his nose out o' joint. Guess we'll show 'em that little ole Elmville's on the map, even if it ain't the county seat. Come on—we'll head in toward Franklin."

"But, please!" Mary urged. "Really, mister, we wanted to run into you to-night.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

These men are innocent. Maybe you won't believe that, and you don't have to right now. But, please head back toward Elmville. That circus man, Fernando, and his gang are planning to rob the bank to-night. Maybe they've started now.

"They wanted to get you officers out of the way. Please take us into Elmville. You'll be glad of it. It's the same to us. We can't have the robbery blamed on us if we're not there—but by the time you get back there Fernando and his bunch will have gone. They have a high-powered car. They're desperate men. They wouldn't stop at murder, I'm afraid."

"Lady," said the constable, "I'm lettin' you ride without handcuffs, but you'll have to be good, or I'll snap 'em on. You got some game in your mind; likely have us ambushed on the way back to Elmville. If you're so anxious to go that way, then we'll go *this* way.

"That's a good story o' yours, but I wasn't born yestiddy. Come on, you crooks! Lead the horses, Joe, or some o' you can git on 'em if you want to. Lady, you'll have to hoof it. You might's well learn one thing right now. You can't gyp me."

The party started toward Franklin, Mary continuing her plea to the leading constable until he demanded that she cease her protestations or be handcuffed.

"Tell all that bus'ness to the judge," he advised. "We ain't holdin' court. We're jus' takin' you to the calaboose. Other matters can wait until later."

"An' don't forgit that I claim the reward," put in the farmer. "Ef it wasn't thet my boy, Ben, found 'em in that pasture, ye wouldn't knowed nothin' 'bout 'em."

"Oh, wouldn't we?" sneered the leader. "We didn't catch 'em in no pasture, did we? It wasn't no news that they was at large—we knew that. I'm the one that gets that reward, far as I can see. An' my men gets a share."

The avaricious farmer continued to argue. The dispute grew heated. Mary regarded it as an opportunity. The constables had returned their revolvers to their holsters. The farmer's shotgun seemed the chief menace. He slouched along, the weapon now held loosely between his arm, barrel pointing downward. She sidled toward him; with a quick movement she wrenched away the shotgun and brought it to her shoulder.

"If you make one move for your guns I'll pull this trigger!" she yelled. "We're desperate! We know there's a bank being robbed back in Elmville right now. You"—to the leader of the party—unlock the handcuffs from those men or I'll blow your head off—quick! I mean business—just try me! The rest of you men put up your hands! You can keep yours down, sonny; but don't dare to run."

Four pairs of hands went up. The leader, muttering under his breath, proceeded to free Hell-Bent and Archy of their bonds. "I'm doin' it," he said, "but you birds 'll *git life* when y' *are* caught."

"We'll risk that," said Mary, as the shotgun transferred to Hell-Bent, she disarmed the sheepish-looking constables.

"March 'em into that lot, under those trees," she instructed Hell-Bent. "If these rubes would listen to reason, we'd help them make the biggest capture of their lives. But they're know-alls. You'd better use those ropes to tie them to those trees."

"They was made for that purpose, Mary," said Hell-Bent, blandly, as he marched the now hunted hunters to the trees. Archy kept them covered while the cow-puncher wrapped a rope about three of the deputies and made them fast to the bole of a large oak. The other officer, the farmer, and the boy, were made fast to another.

"We do lots o' things with ropes out in my country," said Hell-Bent. "If you try to free yourselves from them bonds yo're only foolin' yoreselves. You've been hawg tied proper. Well, what's the orders for us now, gen'ral?" he asked Mary, with a grin.

"We march on Elmville," replied Mary, answering him with a smile. "It's a cavalry charge. Colonel Archy, mount your steed."

In front of the captives and Archy, Hell-Bent placed his arms around her and kissed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her. Here was a girl who, in the heart of danger, could joke.

CHAPTER XXV.

PEACEFUL ELMVILLE.

ARMED to the hilt with guns taken from the officers whom they had been obliged to subdue and tie up, Hell-Bent and his two companions rode pell-mell for Elmville. It was well after midnight, and, according to the plans which had been made by the crooks, and which Mary had overheard, Fernando and his henchmen were about to commence their nefarious operations.

Both the bank and the post office were to be attacked; Fernando and Rawlins taking the former, and Weil and the other grifters the government office. Riding between his two partners in adventure, on the way to town, Hell-Bent outlined his plans for circumventing the crooks and rounding them up to turn them over to the law.

"We'll slip into town easylike," he said, "an' without makin' any noise. I'll take the bank to keep an eye on, an' you an' Archy can handle them two thugs that think they're goin' to get away with the post office." He turned to Mary, who still carried the shotgun taken from the farmer.

"You said, didn't you, that the bank an' the post office are on the same side o' Main Street, and kinder close together?"

The girl nodded as they galloped along. "Then you," ordered Hell-Bent, "take up yore place in the shadows on the other side o' the street, where you can keep an eye on both buildin's, an' pot any o' the crooks that tries to make a getaway."

Mary signified her approval of the part she was to play in the coming clean-up. They were drawing close to Elmville, now. They came abreast of a lot, and could see the great expanse of the big top of the Fernando outfit. Not a light gleamed on the grounds.

"They're through there, that's shore," said Hell-Bent. "Prob'ly at their dirty work already. It must be later'n we thought, an' we gotta hurry."

Considerable delay was caused by the attitude of the two horses and Jenny the trick mule. Jenny sniffed the air and refused to be pulled toward a tree that Archy might tie her. The horses pranced and trembled and nickered.

"They're afraid o' somethin'," said Hell-Bent. "Seem to know somethin' rotten's goin' on."

He managed to hobble the animals, however. "We'll leave 'em here handylike," he said. "May need 'em in a hurry. We'll be seen if we go down the main street. Better sep'rate here an' work aroun' to our posts from the rear."

This they did, and Hell-Bent found himself in the rear of the bank, in a dark and shadowy areaway. There did not seem to be a person stirring in the vicinity, and, listening intently, he could not detect the slightest sound. He drew close to a heavily barred window, and, from one side of it, peered cautiously into the bank.

It seemed as dark as a tomb inside, and as silent; he had about come to the conclusion that Fernando must have abandoned his attempt on the place when his hand, moving down one of the bars, came to a sharp jut. He realized at once that the bar had been sawed through, and a quick inspection revealed the fact that the next one to it had also been severed. Both of them had been twisted back into place after the intruders had gained an entry.

The window was closed, but Hell-Bent realized that this did not mean that the intruders were not in the building. If they would bend the heavy bars back into position behind them, certainly they would not leave a telltale open window to reveal their presence to any one making an investigation.

Hell-Bent did not question the plausibility of his deduction, drawn from the fact that two of the bars had been cut through. He knew that banks were protected by burglar alarms of various kinds, but also he knew that clever thieves have no difficulty in putting such devices out of commission. And he no longer had any doubt regarding the real profession of Fernando and his henchmen.

They were clever and unscrupulous

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thieves, and the circus, very probably, had been purchased largely because of the opportunities it offered for grafting and for getting an idea of the resources and lay-out of small towns, and not because of the legitimate returns which the circus enterprise might afford. Thievery was the main line, the circus the side line.

Hell-Bent was thinking of these things, and wondering why there was no evidence of any action, when his eye caught the blue flash of a light inside the bank; then the light was quickly muffled.

The puncher was almost certain that some one was in the building, and it occurred to him that, having cut off their retreat from the rear, they might be planning to make their exit from the front of the place.

It would be easier, he supposed, to open the front of the bank from the inside. He crept quietly around the building. There were only three or four dim lights serving to illuminate the main street, and, reaching the front of the bank, Hell-Bent had no fear of being seen.

He crawled up the steps, bending low, so that any one looking through the bar-protected glass could not see him. Crouched in front of the door, he reached up and turned an ornate bronze knob. To his surprise, the door opened.

Regardless of the danger which might confront him, and still crouching low, he wormed his way into the vestibule of the bank, being careful that the door closed noiselessly behind him. Still keeping close to the floor, he edged his way toward the long desk, surmounted by a grille, which divided the room into two parts, and behind which the bulky modern safe dimly loomed.

Then, raising himself, he peered through the grille and saw two men, almost as indistinct as shadows, working in front of the safe.

They had some kind of a light which they were careful to keep covered, but which, once in awhile, threw a weird illumination over them.

Hell-Bent edged himself quietly to a door which opened into the counting room. He turned the knob of the door carefully, but, apparently, it was fastened by a spring lock on the inside. A large wicket in the top of it was large enough for the purposes of Hell-Bent. He drew his gun, thrust his arm through the aperture, and got ready for action.

"Put 'em up!" he called, sharply but softly, and, in the indistinct light, he saw that the two crooks, alarmed, had promptly obeyed his command.

"Now—over here!" Hell-Bent commanded. They came in his direction, Fernando and Hawkins. "You, Fernando, lower one hand and open this door—no monkey work, or I'll kill you shore!"

Fernando did as he was ordered, and the two crooks came out, their hands high above their heads.

"Get ahead of me," directed Hell-Bent. They did, and, with his gun trained on them, he started them in the direction of the door. Jubilant at having made his capture with so little trouble, Hell-Bent was not aware of the fact that the door, through which the two crooks had come, quietly had opened again, and that a husky young fellow in stocking feet was stealing up behind him.

Suddenly, however, he almost was knocked breathless, and, reeling forward, he found himself in the clutch of a powerful pair of arms.

"I've got you, you cowboy crook!" a resonant voice was saying. "You won't get away from me!"

He saw that Fernando and Hawkins had turned in their direction, apparently aware of the interruption.

"Help me with this yegg!" the young husky appealed to them. "We've got him sewed up this time, all right." With that, at an almost imperceptible sign from Fernando to Rawlins, the two crooks turned on him, and the three of his opponents soon had him subdued and panting on the floor. He had dropped his gun when he first was tackled, and was unarmed, overpowered, and helpless in the grasp of his captors.

"I knew this gent as soon as I saw him, even in the bad light here," the young watchman exclaimed triumphantly. "He's this Hell-Bent Harrison that's been raisin' so much hell through the county."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He turned to Hell-Bent.

"Well, you're done, now, bo. You won't make any more trouble for fifteen or twenty years. Where's that pal you've been travelin' with?"

Hell-Bent realized that it probably would be futile to even attempt an explanation, but he determined to make the effort rather than give up all hope. He was about to speak when Fernando growled: "Shut up, young feller! Anything you say here will be used against you. Save it and tell it to the judge."

He then turned to the watchman. "We've been following this crook for weeks, and thought we would bag him tonight with the goods on him. It's our luck that you showed up, because he's a shifty guy, and he got the drop on us with that gun of his."

"I was upstairs takin' a little snooze," the watchman explained, "and I thought I heard a noise down here. I slipped down and saw that big sombrero of his against the light, and I knew I had the guy that had been causing so much trouble. Just hold him tight and I'll snap the cuffs on him and he'll be safe."

Hell-Bent tried to protest, but Fernando struck him a brutal blow in the face—a blow that sent the puncher reeling. "Don't do so much talkin'," he advised. "Save it 'till you get back to Butte."

He turned to the watchman. "Me, I'm from Montana," he asserted, "where this Hell-Bent is wanted for murder. My friend here is from Colorado, where the authorities would like to lay their hands on Harrison. We've kinda been workin' together on the case."

"I'll throw on the switch and give us some light, and then we can look things over," said the watchman, going in the direction of the wall plug.

As the young fellow turned his back, Fernando quickly reached in his hip pocket and drew out an ugly-looking little blackjack. The lights did not go on, and, a second later, the watchman was unconscious on the floor.

Then Fernando, with a leer on his face, turned to the handcuffed Hell-Bent. "Now for you!" he exclaimed, raising the blackjack high above his head. Hell-Bent tried to side-step to avoid the blow which he knew was coming.

He felt the billy crash against his head, however; there was a blinding flash of hot, white, flame, a sickening sensation of pain, and he drifted into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ROUND-UP.

WHEN he recovered, Mary was bending over him; her eyes were wet with tears.

"Oh, I was afraid they killed you, dear," she sobbed.

Hell-Bent looked up with a puzzled expression. "They? Kill me?" Then, looking about half dazedly, he made out the form of the watchman stretched out on the floor.

"I sorter remember, now," he said, slowly. "Mary, go through that feller's pockets. He's got the key to these cuffs I got on. I reckon them varmints got away."

"I saw them dash out of here," Mary informed him, as she crossed to the watchman's unconscious form and started to rifle his pockets. "I couldn't come right away. I was in front of the post office, and kept pretty busy, as you'll see. But when you didn't show up after awhile, I sensed that something was wrong. I nearly fainted when I found you on the floor here. I guess this is the key."

In another minute Hell-Bent's hands were free; he stood up, rubbed the top of his head.

"Reckon they meant to do me in," he remarked. "They'd leaded me, likely, but they was leery o' shootin' 'count o' the noise. Didja see which d'rection they took? I expect it ain't much use trailin' 'em now."

"It was pretty dark," Mary answered. "Fernando must have had a car right around the corner from the post office. I heard some argument between him and Hawkins; then, when the car shot around the corner, there was only one person in it. It was Fernando. He left Hawkins in the lurch. I have an idea he meant to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

double cross the others all along, and get away alone with the loot."

"He didn't like Hawkins nohow," said the puncher, recalling the verbal battle in the tent on his first night with the circus. "I reckon he jes' aimed to use him an' then drop him. They ain't no honor among them kind o' crooks. How did you an' Archy make out? Weil an' Rawlins got away, too, I reckon?"

"Archy was creeping up on them in the post office when they heard the roar of the car. They ran out. Archy fired. I don't know whether or not he hit anything—anyhow they kept on going.

"They raced after the car about half a block, then before we could get the drop on them crossed through a lot and ran over a side street. You hadn't come out, so I ran over here, while Archy took after them. I've an idea they were making for the circus grounds. Some folks ran out of the Grangers Hotel after the shot was fired. I told them what was up, and some of them ran over that way. The hotelkeeper cranked up his Ford. I told him to guard the other end of Main Street."

Hell-Bent scrambled to his feet. "Lord!" he gasped. "I thought we'd lost out entire. There's jes' a chance we might be in on the doin's. Come on, Mary. Which way is them circus grounds?"

The pair dashed out into the street. Many natives were rushing past the door.

"We'll foller 'em," shouted Hell-Bent. "Keep yore gun ready, Mary. If you see any o' them rattlers, give 'em the lead. Holy sufferin'! What all's *that?*"

A weird figure was progressing through the gloom of Main Street with a peculiar bounding motion. "Good Lord!" ejaculated Hell-Bent. "It's a kangaroo! I'll bet Fernando's let them animals loose to help cover up his get-away!"

As they raced toward the circus lot, this fact was only too apparent. A tawny-maned lion crouched in the gutter before the Elmville Livery, and they could hear the scattered yapping of the trick dogs.

"Don't shoot any of 'em!" warned Mary. "They're harmless. I know 'em all. Even that old lion is toothless and lazy. Oh, Bud! Do you hear anything?"

They stopped and listened. The tattoo of hoofbeats could be made out clearly—and the horses were headed in the opposite direction.

"They've got away!" yelled the puncher. "Tarnation! If you could streak back to the hotel an' get on the telephone, Mary, maybe—"

His suggestion was cut short by two sharp pistol shots.

"Hooray! It's the hotelkeeper!" Mary exclaimed. "He beat them to the other end of the grounds with his car, and I remember he had a gun and was yelling what he wouldn't do."

There was the sound of another shot, some indistinct shouts, then the sound of hoofbeats in rising crescendo.

"Golly! He's headed 'em back this way!" shouted Hell-Bent. "Well, I hope I don't have to kill a good piece o' hoss flesh. Get back there, Mary. Blaze away if you have to, but keep under cover."

Mary, however, who had risked her life daily for years on the flying trapeze, refused to accept such a protected rôle. She was about to utter a protest when there was a thunder of flying feet and the two horsemen emerged from the gloom and Hell-Bent unceremoniously lifted her behind him.

"Get back!" he commanded sharply. Then he raced for the middle of the street, and his two guns spit flame.

The horses reared; the desperate riders turned again, and made for an open lot at the side of the road. "We turned 'em!" said Hell-Bent delightedly. "That was a piece o' strategy. I didn't aim to kill 'em. They're headin' right by where we left our hosses. Foller me, Mary."

He raced after the crooks, ran across the lot to a clump of trees and jumped astride of his horse. "Come on, ole boy!" he urged. "Do somethin' for yore country!"

The horse swept into its easy elastic stride in the wake of the escaping riders.

"Git into it!" crooned the puncher, bending low in his saddle. "Reckon you can run down them two ole billy-goats."

He could hear hoofbeats behind him, and realized that Mary, on Silver Heels, was not far behind.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The road, crescent-shaped, skirted the circus grounds. Hell-Bent sensed that he was gaining. He missed the sound of the hoofbeats in the rear now, and believed that Mary was falling behind. He was glad of it, in a way; he had little doubt of his ability to cow the grifters when he overtook them, and did not want Mary in the path of any flying lead.

As he rounded the final turn he looked back; then realized why the pursuing hoofbeats had faded away. In the bright moonlight he could see that Mary had veered Silver Heels crosslots over the circus grounds, doubtless in an effort to reach the cup of the crescent in a desperate effort to head off the fugitives. The danger of her position forced him to lash the flanks of his mount with his hat, and the spirited animal let out a final burst of speed.

A shot rang out ahead. His heart leaped in fear. Had Mary fired—or had the crooks?

Completing the turn, he found his answer. The moonlight showed the grifters' horses cavorting in panic, clattering from one side of the road to the other, prancing and fidgeting in terror, while the riders cursed loudly.

Twenty feet or so farther up the road Mary, looking like Joan of Arc on her white charger, sat with her automatic leveled at the foiled grifters.

Hell-Bent galloped swiftly up behind them, brought his horse almost to its haunches with a quick jerk of the reins.

"Stick yore hands up, you crooks!" he thundered. "I'm givin' you one chanst, an' that ain't two! Up with them hands, or I'll turn you into a pair o' sieves."

The riders—who, he could see now, were Rawlins and Weil—elevated their hands before the menace of Hell-Bent's guns. Keeping them covered, the grim-faced puncher slid from the back of his horse. Mary cantered down the road toward the trio, her own weapon gleaming in the moonlight. Hell-Bent kept his guns aimed. "Git down—pronto!" he barked.

Rawlins and Weil, the jig up, had no recourse but to obey. "Keep the drop on 'em, Mary," Hell-Bent instructed. "First we'll get this crowbait out o' the way."

He slapped each of the horses on the flanks; riderless, they galloped up the road a piece; one of them leaped a ditch and disappeared in the direction of the circus lot.

"Now," snapped Hell-Bent, "this game o' hide-an'-seek's about over. One break, an' you shore are a brace o' dead c'yotes, an' no monkey business. Where's yore pal? Keep them hooks o' your'n up—way up—Hawkins."

Weil sensed leniency. "If I tell you," he parried, "that makes it easier for us, don't it? We know right where he is. He was one o' the main guys in this. We was only a coupla suckers hauled in, an' then double crossed by Fernando an' that damned drunk. If we tell, wadda we git out of it?"

"Hombre," said Hell-Bent sternly, "you ain't in no position to make no bargains. Yo're caught red-handed. I ain't makin' no deals. I asked you a question: Where's Hawkins?"

"He's over on the circus lot," was Weil's sullen reply. "That damned scarcrow pal o' yours tangled with him when he was gittin' on a horse."

"Then march!" was the command. "March right to that lot. We'll make this capture three-handed. An' if you lower them hands an instant, yo're jes' meat."

While Mary kept them covered, he once more leaped to the back of his horse and rode beside her. The two grifters, heads hanging despondently, tramped on about three feet ahead of them, their hands above their heads.

As the strange cavalcade turned into the circus lot, a whoop of joy greeted them.

"Attaboy!" yelled Archy. He was sitting, tailor-fashion, on what looked like an old suit of clothes, the badly battered form of Hawkins.

"He put up a good fight," Archy admitted. "I got him just as he was about to git on his horse. He gave me this," pointing to a badly blackened eye. "I didn't think it was in the ole rum-pot. I'll give 'im credit. But I guess I told you I carried a sock in both hands, didn't I? Yes, I gotta blinker outa it, but wait'll you look over this guy. I hope they gotta nice

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beauty parlor in the jail they send him to —he'll need a little attention, an' about three sets o' false teeth. Gee! Didja see them animals? That's what our horses was afraid of to-night, I'll bet. A big boey-constrictor was glidin' aroun' here a little while ago. Glad I ain't drinkin'. But where's the Big Cheese?"

"Fernando got away," Hell-Bent told him. "Well, a feller can't expect to hold a royal flush."

His eye was roving about the grounds. A cage-wagon, its door open, stood about ten feet away. "But I reckon we'll have a full house, anyway. Arch, haul that on-fortunate acrobat into that cage. An' you, gents"—turning to Weil and Rawlins—"jes' climb right in there pronto. It wasn't made for low animals like you, but I reckon you'll be safe there. Archy, you say this gent was escapin' on a hoss?"

"He was tryin' to. I pulled him down an' crossed me right to the button. It was a good little workout for me."

"Where's that hoss? We'll make a team."

The animal, however, had disappeared. "We'll use my bronc then," Hell-Bent compromised.

Less than a quarter of an hour later, the three grifters securely locked in the cage-wagon, the horse lashed to one side of the pole with odd bits of harness and rope gleaned from the lot, the nondescript equipage started back toward the center of the town. Archy led the strange one-horse team. Hell-Bent perched himself on top of the wagon. Mary, on Silver Heels, led the procession.

There were shouts as they progressed up the main street. A fluster of Elmvilleites were gathered about the steps of the Grangers Hotel. The porch light illuminated the little circle. "Somethin' doin', sheriff," some one yelled. "Lookit this turnout, will ye?"

"Reckon here's where I j'ine these animals in the cage," mumbled Hell-Bent. "He's an obstinate little cuss, but I'm goin' to do a little oratin'. Hold yore hoss, Arch." Then he stood up, put his hands over his head, and from the top of the wagon addressed Wiggins.

"Sheriff," he began, "I reckon you don't cotton to me much. But we got three crooks in this here cage-wagon, an' I'd admire to do a little explainin'. We ain't no hoss-thieves. We ain't no crooks whatsomever. We was framed by—"

"Wait a minute," cut in Wiggins. "I've had ye with yer hands up. Now I command ye to put 'em down. Ye're a wild 'n, ye darned son-of-a-gun!" he said, with grudging admiration. "But it begins to look like y' ain't no criminal."

"But what-all—" began Hell-Bent.

"Wait a minute," ordered Wiggins again. "Some feller named Hoover called me up at Valesburg, tipped me to what was bein' pulled off here. I called back to the p'lice office here, but couldn't get no answer.

"I got three o' my deppities together in a hurry, an' streaked it over here in a car. We ran into a little mess up the Franklin road apiece. This here fat circus guy went in the ditch with his car. He's dyin'—maybe dead by now. Small loss if he is. We got back the swag—an' we got his confession. It vindicates ye—ye darned son-of-a-gun!

"But say, where in time's the p'lice force in this town? Course they ain't much good. When they want an'thing *done*, they gotta call on the county seat, y'notice."

Hell-Bent leaped down from his perch, grabbed the sheriff's hand and wrung it. "I gotta hand it to you, sheriff," he said. "Yo're pretty much of a man—for the East. An' these constables is tied up to a tree between here an' Franklin. Like as not ye ran within a few feet of 'em on the way in here.

"They was stubbornlike, wouldn't listen to reason, couldn't see any crooks whatsomever except my pore peaceable pard, Arch, an' yores sincerely. I reckon they done penance enough, so I'll cavort out thataway an' set 'em free. An' by the way, sheriff, I'd like you to meet the lady that'll be Mrs. Bud Harrison—to-day."

The dumpy little official removed his hat with a courtly gesture. "Congratulations, miss," he said. "Ye're gittin' a pretty good man—for a Westerner. An' say, Harrison, I guess you an' me split a reward. Yours can be a present from the county—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from the county seat, ye might say. An' I'll ride over toward them tin p'licemen. I've been waitin' for years to git a real laugh on that bunch."

CHAPTER XXVII.

DAYBREAK.

A MANGY and toothless old lion, after having wandered a considerable distance from Elmville, was frisking and frolicking through the woods and fields, reveling in its new-found liberty.

It paused at the bottom of a little hill and, feeling the impulse of some atavistic instinct, threw back its head, shook its mane, and vibrated the atmosphere with a long and mighty roar. Then, in two or three leaps, it reached the top of the hill and, monarch of all it surveyed, looked here and there over the undulating country around it.

It was not particularly keen of sight, but it still retained an acute sense of smell and, on a breeze that came wafting from the direction of a large tree in the near distance, it detected the man-scent. Having been born and bred in captivity, it was perfectly familiar with the odor and held no particular antipathy toward the strange two-legged creatures from which it emanated. As a matter of fact, the lion, being rather weary of the great outdoors, was, like an aged convict, quite ready to return to captivity. So, sniffing the air, it started in the direction of the large tree.

It was Officer Dibbins, bound to one of the trees with two of his companions, who first sighted the king of beasts on the top of the hill where it made a noble silhouette and appeared of elephantine proportions against the rising sun.

"Murder!" he shrieked at the top of his voice, struggling frantically with the rope with which Hell-Bent had efficiently bound the recalcitrant coppers. "There's a big lion up on the hill lookin' at us!"

There was more violent tugging at the rope on the part of two more panic-stricken officers. One of them, by straining his neck, could see what Officer Dibbins saw. The farmer and his son bound to the opposite tree also were making strange remarks about a lion. But the third official on Officer Dibbins's tree had a strong suspicion that he was being kidded. Such things simply didn't happen.

"Sure," he guffawed, determined not to be hoaxed. "I see a elephant comin' out o' the woods yonder. I hope he don't step on me. An' there's a couple o' pink giraffes an' a gold fish."

"He's runnin' right toward us," yelled Officer Dibbins. "Baldwin"—to the doubting Thomas—"I mean it."

"Sure," said the cynical Baldwin. "Play dead, you guys," he advised with a chortle. "They say animals won't touch people what ain't breathin'."

There was a sudden cessation of all noise as Officer Dibbins, his official companion and the farmer and his son, like most other students of unnatural history, had heard the fable now recalled to their minds by the joking Baldwin.

Four pairs of eyes were closed, four pairs of lungs stopped breathing, four bodies hung limp and apparently lifeless inside of the ropes which bound them. A moment passed.

"Say, what's the matter with you guys?" the unbeliever asked. Then, from the opposite side of the tree, he caught the sound of a sniffing that made the cold chills run up and down his spine. "What's that, Dibbins?" he gulped.

Dibbins did not answer, but the doubter heard again the heavy breathing and the soft padding of feet coming nearer. He looked sidewise out of his eyes, and saw a great tawny head.

"Gosh a'mighty!" he screamed at the top of his voice, and the head disappeared. Then, taking his own advice so jocularly offered a few minutes before, Baldwin promptly played dead himself.

It was just at this moment that a group of riders came over the hill and descended silently over the thick turf toward the tree where the officers were tied. Hell-Bent Harrison and Wiggins were in the lead, and, seeing the limp figures of the officers, they were somewhat startled.

Hell-Bent leaped quickly from his horse and, running toward Officer Dibbins,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

grabbed him by the shoulder. Dibbins let out one wail of despair, and then, opening his eyes, saw the astonished puncher standing in front of him, and Wiggins's pudgy form a little to the rear. He drew in a mighty draft of air and then gasped out:

"I thought you was the lion! Gosh, but I'm glad you folks are here!"

Five pairs of ears heard the salutation of Officer Dibbins, and four men and a boy suddenly came to life, each of them gasping for breath. Hell-Bent wandered around the tree and then burst into laughter.

"You shore look like four guys what's been playin' trombones," he asserted, "an' playin' 'em to beat the band."

Sheriff Wiggins was rolling on the ground in unholy mirth. "I wish I had a pitcher of you man hunters," he gurgled. "Somethin' to run in the *Courier*—down in the county seat."

The officers were then quickly released. They stared in astonishment at a beautiful girl who was frolicking with the lion and petting it. "He's just my nice big kitty-cat," said Mary.

Archy had absorbed much of the playfulness of the group. Mounted on Jenny, the trick mule, he had taken the lariat with which the officers had been bound, and was dashing about, roping fence posts, tree stumps, and other objects which suited his fancy.

"That Archy'll make a top hand yet," Hell-Bent confided to Mary as they rode along contentedly together. "After he's learned some o' the tricks I'll—that is, *we'll* make him foreman of *our* ranch, Mary."

That was a great day in Elmville, by far the greatest day in the history of the little town.

There was a wedding that afternoon, witnessed by crowds for miles around. It was held in the big top, the large canvas inclosure which had been abandoned forever by Fernando's aggregations of marvels from many lands.

The sensational capture of the bandits and the part played in it by the Westerner and the circus girl had been broadcasted, via party lines, and at noon the country folk commenced to pour into Elmville. Before three o'clock, the time set for the ceremony, the tent was filled to the utmost tiers. No admission was charged, of course; perhaps this had something to do with the capacity attendance.

"I ain't so keen on this darned ballyhoo," Hell-Bent said to Mary. He hung back bashfully.

"But the way you've rampaged over this county, you owe the county folks a little entertainment," smiled the girl. "Just shut your eyes if you want to. I wonder where Archy is? We can't let our best man get away."

Archy put in an appearance shortly, and the reason for his absence was made clear. He emerged in a Prince Albert and a silk tie of ancient vintage.

"Got these at the hotel," he said. "They made a reg'lar hero outa me down there. I guess this blinker o' mine don't look very good; anyhow it matches my coat an' hat. Say, pal, I oughta be feelin' happy, but I'm worried. I ain't seen nor heard nothin' o' the mam'zelle. Nobody in town's seen her. Gee, I wish we could have her as bridesmaid, or maybe even—"

"Archy," Mary cut in, "that reminds me. Mam'zelle Dazie left the show at Franklin, and she left a note with me to give to you. I have it tucked away somewhere. Wait, I'll try to find it."

She returned a few moments later and handed Archy a sealed envelope with the one word "Archy" scrawled on the outside of it in a backward flowing feminine hand.

"I told her how you admired her, and she remembered you when she was leaving," said Mary.

Archy broke open the flap, scanned the note, and turned cheerfully to the couple before him.

"I always said you couldn't trust no blonde," he asserted. "I guess I know women all right. That gal went an' led me on, an' all the time she knew she was goin' to get married. She says that she's in love an' is leavin' the show to get hitched up, an' that after that she's goin' West with her husband. Well, I'm goin' West,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

too," he concluded. "Maybe I'll meet her out there."

A few moments before the ceremony an old Democrat wagon came rattling into the grounds, and Hell-Bent, Mary and Archy, saw old Thad Lonsdale.

"Now there'll be fireworks—there shore will!" he predicted.

He walked over, greeted the old couple, and met the reproachful eyes of Alta with all the nerve he could muster. She managed to get him to one side while her grandparents talked with Archy.

"Hell-Bent," she gulped, with a suggestion of tears in her voice, "if you get married to that girl I'll never smile again."

Hell-Bent was conscience-stricken; then, as he always did in the face of an emergency, he had an inspiration.

"Alta," he said, "how all would you like to rustle up the purtiest dress in all Elmville an' be Mary's bridesmaid when we're tied double in the big top?"

A smile slowly crept over the face of the girl, and Hell-Bent, jubilant, broke out into laughter. He raised a finger and spoke with mock severity.

"You darned little flirt," he said. "Yo're smilin' already. You don't think nothin' o' me nohow."

The Elmville Silver Cornet Band played a brass accompaniment of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, and Justice of the Peace Dobbs tied the knot that joined Hell-Bent and his charming bride. The applause was so tumultuous when the ceremony was ended that the bride and groom had to take many, many curtains.

They were prominent figures at the dance in Potter's Hall that night, the grateful banker having donated the hall for the occasion. Archy had already forgotten his "grande passion." He was dancing frequently and paying decided attention to the ladies.

That night the "bridal suite" of the Grangers Hotel was put at the disposal of Hell-Bent and Mary, and after the dance they were sitting silently by the open window, looking out into the foliage tinged with the silver of the moonlight.

The blossoming clematis of the veranda tinged the air. Mary was on her husband's lap, her head against his shoulder; he was tenderly caressing her hair. The voice of Archy, seated on the veranda below, came clearly through the night.

"Shucks!" they heard him exclaim, with the scornful accent of a man born and raised on the plains. "My pal Hell-Bent's ranch is bigger'n this here hull county. An' me, I'm top-hand, I am."

And Hell-Bent, smiling, looked into the mirthful eyes of Mary and gathered her a little closer into his arms.

"Mary," he said, "there's a feller out in Puncher's Sidin' named Leather Merrill that I want you to meet. He shore has proved to be a great friend o' mine."

THE END

SUNSET

WHEN daylight fades, and evening songs
The birds are caroling,
Like busy maids-in-waiting, all
The clouds come gathering—
And, fleecy sheets and blankets spread,
To put the little Sun to bed!

They tuck him in. Then, Lady Night
Draws her black curtains down,
Lights up the stars, and on the Moon
Hangs up the Sun's gold crown.
And so—until another day,
He sleeps the quiet hours away!

Mazie V. Caruthers.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yuma Tom, Deputy

By JOSEPH T. KESCEL

EYES constantly sweeping the country, they rode side by side through the low Arizona hills, southward toward the United States-Mexico international boundary line.

The tall, grizzled man in his shirt sleeves, astride the sleek-coated buckskin, was Sheriff Bob Hunter.

The wrinkled-faced little Indian was old Yuma Tom—who, in the rough, out-of-door dress of the white man, sat with ease on his great-chested strawberry roan stallion, Red Gold.

Suddenly Yuma Tom drew rein, grunted, and swung to the ground, his coal black eyes fixed on a young cactus plant, which bore signs of having been recently disturbed.

Hunter spoke as he left his saddle and joined the little redskin. "What is it, Tom? Found something?"

"Um. Yeah." Yuma Tom replied without looking up. "This cactus been hit by horse's hoof just little while ago. I see track in dirt right by side. The horse you call Long Calk makeum, too.

"Look, see for yourself. The calk on inside shoe of left hind hoof, three times as long as on reg'lar shoe. Fixum that way to make cayuse travel square on feet. Um-m-m. Now maybe you soon have your man. Oh, maybe, two men—'cause two cayuse go by here together. Tracks and signs tellum me that."

Rifle in hand, Hunter bent over.

"You're sure right, Tom!" he exclaimed. "That's Long Calk. I'd know the imprint of that shoe any place. And, as you say, the tracks are fresh.

"Gosh a'mighty, but I'd like to slap my hands on the rider of that hoss! He's been the bane of my life for quite a spell now. And always, when I've run across one of his tracks, I know, sure as shootin', that some deviltry is afoot.

"Quite often he's with the gang of smugglers' runnin' to a fence on this side of the line stuff they ain't got no right to bring into this country from Mexico. And as I'm the sort of a sheriff who b'lieves in workin' with the Federal officers, it hurts a lot that I can't grab the rider of Long Calk. Especially when, back in Washington, they say that more stuff is bein' smuggled into

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the country right hereabouts than in any other stretch along the whole southwest border.

"Long Calk, to me, is Long Calk in great big letters. Whoever rides him is the brains of the gang. Once we land him— Well, I know a heap of trouble will be off my mind.

"And, let me tell you, too, that hoss is fast! Only a month back, when I was ridin' Buckskin Bill here, I caught sight of him with a man on his back, on this side of Alkali Flat. I sabied right away that it was Long Calk, as I'd followed his tracks through the hills here. In about two ticks a race was on, straight out across the Flat.

"Bill, as you know, is a good hoss. But the black, or brown, or whatever color Long Calk is, pulled away from Bill as if he had been little more than a crippled mustang."

"Um," commented Yuma Tom, already moving forward. "And now, track leadum toward Alkali Flat again. Shall we follow-um?"

"Yeah, Tom," Hunter returned, dropping in behind Red Gold, who—doglike—was following his master.

The grizzled sheriff really did think Long Calk was his jinx. He felt satisfied that this fleet-footed horse belonged to the leader of the band of smugglers that operated so extensively through the broken country not a great many miles from Calito, the sprawling town in which Hunter's office was situated. And it was in the hope that the famous little Apache tracker might help him locate the gang's confederates on the American side of the line that Hunter had called on old Yuma Tom.

Now it seemed that Yuma Tom was already on a hot scent. At any rate, he suddenly started jogtrotting ahead through the cañon, rifle in his hand, and Red Gold still following him.

"Tracks heap fresh," Yuma Tom called back to Hunter, who, after hustling along on foot for a couple of hundred yards, had again mounted Buckskin Bill. "Keep your eye open."

The sheriff did that most thoroughly, as, riding on for a quarter of a mile, he kept shifting his gaze from point to point of the hills, dotted here and there with cactus plants or scraggly brush. And he was still doing it when the cañon widened out on to the north side of Alkali Flat—a dry, dusty, five-mile circular valley upon which nothing more grew than an occasional tuft of grass.

Then as Yuma Tom, barely clear of the break in the hills, suddenly stepped backward and held up his hand as a signal to halt, the sheriff knew that the sharp-eyed old tracker had seen something. Placing a finger crosswise of his wrinkled lips, Yuma Tom signaled to the sheriff for a cautious advance.

Dismounting, Hunter tiptoed to the Indian's side and whispered: "What did you see, Tom?"

"Maybe your men, Mista Bob. Look-um!"

Hats off, they peeked round a big bowlder jutting out from the hillside, the sheriff standing while Yuma Tom knelt down.

Close in to the hills, and about four hundred yards away, they had made out two horses, with a rider on one, and a man on the ground, apparently tightening the cinch on the other horse—when Buckskin Bill, spying a bunch of grass just beyond the cañon's mouth, walked out into plain sight.

Hunter swore under his breath. While Yuma Tom grunted, "Guh-h! Fool cayuse, come back here!"

But he, like Hunter, knew that the cat was now out of the bag. For the man on the ground suddenly sprang on to the back of his horse, and the pair immediately spurred out on to Alkali Flat—heading south toward Mexico.

"Come on, Tom!" Hunter cried sharply, running for his horse. "One of 'em is Long Calk! And this time he's goin' to be our meat!"

Swinging into their saddles, the sheriff and Yuma Tom tore away from the hills at top speed, their eyes fixed on the racing pair four hundred yards ahead of them—whose mounts kicked up the alkali dust in a veritable cloud which drifted back lazily on the gentle afternoon breeze.

"Stop! Halt! Stop!" Hunter yelled, as the buckskin pounded along in great, ground-covering strides, with Red Gold a little off to the right and a half length to the rear.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Both Yuma Tom and the grizzled sheriff had their doubts as to whether the command had been heard by the fugitives. The thud, thud of their horses' hoofs probably drowned out such distant calls.

Yet Hunter yelled again, his rifle held ready in his right hand for a quick swing to his shoulder. "Hold on, there! Stop! I'm an officer!"

As he rather expected, however, those ahead paid no heed, but raced on side by side, the dust popping up with each hoof put down. Because the dust was hanging low it was difficult to distinguish more than that both the horses were dark colored and that both the riders wore dark clothes.

Crouched forward in the saddle, reins in his left hand and rifle in his right, old Yuma Tom wondered whether Hunter was going to take a shot at the fleeing pair or would content himself with shouting commands at them.

His uncertainty was suddenly cleared up when Hunter, after dropping Buckskin Bill's bridle over the saddle horn, raised his rifle to his shoulder; and as a sharp crack rent the air Yuma Tom saw a fan-shaped puff of dust pop up, well ahead and to the left of the left side rider.

"Um," said Yuma Tom to himself. "It is very strange that my old white brother missed. It is not like him. So now I shall see what I can do. I am sure that my bullet will find its mark." And the little Indian raised his rifle to his shoulder.

But before the bobbing muzzle had grown steady, as a coal black eye peered along the barrel, Hunter shouted: "No, Tom. Don't you shoot! That was all a bluff. I pulled off to the side on purpose. Even though I'm a sheriff, I ain't got the right to go drillin' folks promiscus.

"All I can do is to try and make 'em pull up by bluffin'. And, like as not, they know it as well as anybody, from the way they're still burnin' it."

Yuma Tom's grunt of assent was inaudible to the sheriff. But as he saw the rifle lowered to a less menacing position, he knew that, for the time, there would be no shooting from the red man's weapon.

For a half mile the race went on. And then, through the dust, the pursuers saw one of the fugitive's horses stumble and almost go down. Saving himself from a fall, though, he tore ahead.

Yet before the next half mile had been covered, both Hunter and Yuma Tom saw that they were now rapidly gaining. The four-hundred yard lead had been cut to three hundred and twenty-five.

Another half mile, and the three twenty-five was cut to little more than two. Then Hunter once more shouted: "Halt! Stop! I'm an officer. If you don't pull up—I'll shoot."

The warning was answered by a sudden turn in his saddle on the part of the rider of the horse that had stumbled, and by a shot from his revolver at the oncoming pair.

Almost like one, Hunter's and Yuma Tom's rifles flew to their shoulders. Though before they could fire, the rider who had not shot wrenched the shooter's weapon free, and the pair hurried on.

From the way in which they had been gaining since the horse had stumbled, Hunter and the old redman both calculated that the horse had injured itself. And now, very naturally, their thoughts were: "Is it Long Calk?"

If it was, the sheriff would feel heartily satisfied, as he felt sure that once he got his hands on Long Calk's rider, he would have the man he had been looking for for many days.

Four hundred yards more, with the pursuers gaining rapidly. And then, as one of the horses ahead was pulled to a standstill—the other raced away.

Scarcely had Hunter drawn rein beside the halted man, and noted that he was a well-dressed Mexican, about thirty, of the better class, and unarmed, when his eyes turned toward the ground. Mounted as he was, he could not tell from the tracks in the dust which horse had evaded its pursuers.

But the instant he heard Yuma Tom say: "This is no Long Calk! He other one," Hunter gave his orders sharply.

"All right then, Tom. I deputize you to take this man to jail in Calito. Lock him up, and keep him locked up till I come back." With this, the sheriff handed his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

deputy a bunch of keys and tore off after Long Calk and his rider.

Easing himself in the saddle as he sat astride the panting Red Gold, Yuma Tom gave part of his attention to his prisoner, though his thoughts were mostly of the pursued and the pursuer, fast becoming little more than bobbing specks in the dust and distance, until at last they were completely lost in the hills on the south side of Alkali Flat.

Then the Indian turned to his prisoner, who, he knew, went by the name of Carlos Gomez, and said: "All right, Gomez. Come 'long with me to Calito."

"Why should I go to Calito with you?" Gomez asked, glibly enough under the circumstances, as he reached in his vest pocket for a cigarette. "I have done nothing. Neither has my companion. We were simply riding this way to our own country, when we happened to see a horse come out on the flat. We thought that you were bandits—and—and we at once tried to save ourselves."

"Um, yeah," Yuma Tom answered. "But you better come 'long, just the same."

"Why, Indio? Why?" Gomez persisted. "I have done nothing. We thought you were bandits. That is all. And naturally, we tried to get away—as both my companion and myself have quite large sums of money on us. We did not want to hand over that money, if we could help it.

"But now—" Gomez smiled as he looked fixedly at Yuma Tom—"to you, perhaps, I would part with a fair amount of the money—providing you would let me go on to my own country."

"I no bribe taker!" Yuma Tom snapped. "Calito, right pronto! Or I bang you on the head with my rifle."

"But I have done nothing, Indio!" Gomez protested. "On what charge can you hold me?"

"'Cause," said Yuma Tom sharply, "'cause you shootum at officer in discharge of his duty.

"I know what that mean. For once—long time ago, when my people war on palefaces—I shootum at officer myself. Only I hitum. And it make big rumpus. So come 'long."

At last convinced that the old redskin could not be bribed, Gomez assented. "All right, Indio! Calito it is, then. But mark my words, I have done nothing for which I can be held."

It was nearly six o'clock when Yuma Tom, with his prisoner, rode along Calito's dusty Main Street—flanked by sprawling, low buildings—to the jail, where Gomez was locked in a cell, and the recently appointed deputy sat down in the office to wait for the sheriff.

Three hours passed. Ten o'clock—eleven—midnight—and later. Then, when Hunter had not yet put in his appearance, Yuma Tom stretched himself out on a cot in a room just off the office, for a few hours' sleep.

At sunrise he arose, to find the sheriff still absent. But a little later on, as he walked to the jail door, he was surprised to meet his own son, Gray Hawk—like his father, a small man.

"Good morning, my son," Yuma Tom greeted him in his own tongue. "What brings you here?"

"A message from Sheriff Hunter, father. He was unexpectedly called upon by a rancher to try to round up some cattle rustlers. He told me to tell you that the party he was after, got away. But you are to hold your prisoner until he returns to Calito."

Yuma Tom nodded. "I will do that. Yet I cannot see what good it will do, as the Mexican has nothing incriminating on his person. The white man's laws are queer, though. And no doubt my paleface brother knows what he is about. His wish shall be my law."

During the day, up until two o'clock in the afternoon—when a pretty, black-eyed, smooth-cheeked, young Mexican woman, with a flowered mantilla over her head, walked into the office—the old redman and his son did little more than sit around and smoke.

"What is it, señorita?" Yuma Tom, standing behind Hunter's desk, asked in Spanish, which he spoke better than English.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My brother, Carlos, señor," said the woman softly. "A Mexican friend tells me that you have him locked up here. I am sure there must be some mistake. Carlos would do nothing wrong. He is a most honorable man. Why is he here?"

"Because he shot at an American officer in discharge of his duty." Yuma Tom remembered that sentence very distinctly, as it had been told him years before, when he had asked much the same question as that just asked by his dark-eyed visitor.

The woman sighed and looked greatly downcast. "That is so unlike Carlos! But what must I do to have him released?"

"See the sheriff, señorita."

"That I will do. Where is he?"

Yuma Tom scratched his bare black head. "I do not know. Still, he will return here within a day or two."

"And meanwhile my darling brother must lie in this filthy American jail!" she pouted. "Can you not, on your own authority, release him?"—

"No," said Yuma Tom firmly. "That is not for me to do. My orders are that your brother be held until my old friend returns. And those orders shall be carried out."

The young woman shook her head sadly. "May I have a talk with my brother?"

"Ciertamente, señorita," Yuma Tom returned, and for the next ten minutes he stood beside her as she talked to Gomez through the barred cell door.

A little later on, from the jail's front step, Yuma Tom and his son saw Gomez's visitor swing lightly into the saddle on a splendid, dapple-brown horse which had been tied to a hitching rail in front of a general store across the street.

When she rode away, they followed her with their eyes for a hundred yards, where she started to turn around a corner. Then, as though just remembering something, she drew rein and came back to the jail, stopping at the edge of the rough plank sidewalk.

"Oh, señor," she said, taking a package of homemade Mexican cigarettes from a silken handbag, until then concealed beneath her mantilla, "I forgot something. These cigarettes for my dear brother. Will you kindly give them to him? He does so miss his tobacco."

Yuma Tom stepped to the edge of the walk and took the package of smokes, which he saw were held together by a twisted strand of corn husk. "Ciertamente, señorita."

"Thank you, señor." The pretty, black-eyed rider gave the old Indian a sad smile, and started off again in the same direction that she had taken before.

Standing on the plank sidewalk, the little redskin watched her ride along the street until she was nearly to the corner. Suddenly, as his eyes turned to the ground, his right hand flew to the butt of his revolver.

For an instant, it looked as if he were going to draw and shoot. But when the weapon was halfway out of its holster, he let go of the butt, and as it slipped back into place he turned and shambled into the office, motioning to his son to follow.

After closing and locking the street door, he did such an astonishing thing that Gray Hawk looked at his father in amazement.

For old Yuma Tom, turning around, facing the wall, and raising his arms above his head, wailed in English—not in his own stately tongue—"My son, give your pa a good swift kick in pants! Oh, I fine deputy! That horse was Long Calk. I see tracks in dust, as señorita get near the corner.

"When my hand fly down to my pistol, I have for little instant the thought of shootum. But quick it come to me, not right to shoot girl in back. Sheriff Bob no do it—and I takin' his place.

"If I call to stop, she scootum fast out of sight. While by time I saddle Red Gold, she be mile away. 'Cause that same young squaw ride Long Calk yesterday afternoon. Only then she dressed like man. It all planned with her and Gomez that when his horse go lame, she ride off fast, as it no need for both to be tookum prisoner.

"And Sheriff Bob told me that if he could only catch Long Calk and his rider, things for him would be heap slick! Oh, I fine deputy, all right! Kick, my son, kick! Hard, my son."

"On our horses, and take after her, father!" Gray Hawk cried.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Still facing the office wall, Yuma Tom replied sadly: "No use! She be long way toward Mexico before we get started. And I know how fast Long Calk can run. Kickum!"

Ready to laugh—for he had taken on many of the white man's ways—Gray Hawk turned his father around and pulled down his hands.

"Do not take it so hard," he said consolingly. "The man is still back there in his cell. And very likely, the woman will come again."

At the moment, Yuma Tom had his doubts as to that. And he was in no wise sure at dark, when Sheriff Hunter had not yet returned.

Nor at two o'clock in the morning, when with the beams of a quarter-moon dimly lighting up the room off from the jail's office, a slim, light-footed Mexican tiptoed to the bunk in the corner and pressed the cold muzzle of a cocked revolver against the bare black head of a little red man lying there.

"Sh-h-h!" whispered the intruder, as the Indian stirred. "Lie still, or I shall shoot you. And make no outcry when I gag and bind you, or I shall surely press the trigger."

Under such circumstances, resistance would have seemed foolhardy, and the redskin grunted: "Um. I keep very still. I no move."

He was deftly bound and gagged. Shortly afterward he heard the clink of metal, as a bunch of keys was taken from his overalls pocket. Then, a few seconds later, the creaking of hinges, as the door of the cell in which Gomez had been locked up, was swung open.

But he did not hear the whispered: "Carlos, my husband, I am here," as Señora Gomez stole through the darkness of the cell toward the man she saw sitting on the edge of a cot, his figure barely visible by the moonlight that came through the barred window.

"Sh-h-h!" came back the reply, warningly. "Be careful."

"Be careful of what?" Señora Gomez almost chuckled. "There is nothing to fear. The stupid old Indio is bound and gagged, like the old fool that he is. The sheriff is miles from here."

"Sh-h!" came the warning again. "The walls may have ears."

The woman stepped closer, and with voice so low that it could scarcely be heard went on: "There is nothing to fear. You will soon be away from this odious place. Our horses are hidden in the brush at the edge of town. Things could not have worked out better for us.

"There is no danger. And even now a twenty-mule load of contraband is being taken, under the leadership of your brother, to our fence—to Marcos Amador's ranch. I talked it over with your brother, and we decided that with you in jail, no one would suspect us of such audacity. Kiss me, my husband. Kiss me! Then we will be on our way."

The man sitting on the edge of the cot opened his arms and drew the woman to his chest. But instead of kissing her, old Yuma Tom made sure that one of his hands fastened on her revolver, while the other securely grabbed Señora Gomez's left wrist.

"Who are you? What does this mean?" she panted, trying to wrench herself free from his embrace.

"Just me—a fool, stupid, Injun deputy!" old Yuma Tom drawled, in Spanish, holding the surprised woman close. "For a stupid old Indio, I am much pleased that you have revealed who is your fence on this side of the line. Gracias, too, for not harming my son, whom you bound and gagged.

"Of course, you would like to know how we knew you were coming here tonight. The Yaqui Indian signs inside the cigarette wrappers, señora! I read them as well as my own Apache—for Yaqui and Apache are almost one tribe, though one is in Mexico, the other in the United States.

"When my white brother, Sheriff Bob, returns, he and I will go with a posse to Amador's ranch. Then later, the Great White Father in Washington will say to my white brother: 'You good man, Mista Bob—and I thank you.'"

THE END

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

LETTERS are pouring in upon the editor from every side, and he hopes to use all the available ones in due course, but not necessarily in the order of their receipt. He wishes to remind his correspondents, however, that they should sign their full names, although only the initials will be used in the magazine.

MAPLETON, IOWA.

What do I think of "Moonglow"? I think it is one of the best stories you have published this year and wish to thank you for it. The description is very real, so real, I can see the mansion, the grounds, and last, but not least, Miss Mary. Charles Francis Coe is no longer a comer, he is here. His wonderful description and command of English I can compare to only one other writer, that immortal author, Joseph Conrad. I wish to thank him as well as you for "Moonglow." I would like to see another like Perkins's "Sundown Café," or some swashbuckler tales or some "different" stories. R. W. R.

STERLING, ILL.

The first story I read in the ARGOSY was "The Range Rider." *That* was a *story*. Since then, among the best that I have read are "Horsemen Against the Moon" and "The Mesa." I wouldn't care if the ARGOSY was made up of all war and Western stories, for I like action and gun-play in a story. I also like the easy drawl of the Western cowboy. K. K.

LOS ANGELES, CAL.

Since you ask, I, for one, say *less Westerns*. If you must have so many, at least cut out the dialect stories. The news-stands are full of publications catering to those who prefer Western yarns, and you seem to have been bitten by the same flea. This is a kind word from a twenty-year reader, one who realizes you offer the greatest value for the least money, but regret to see both the ARGOSY and *Munsey* entering the wild West arena. Bring back Elizabeth York Miller. By the way, MacIsaac is good enough to stick to his own name. A. O.

STANFORDVILLE, N. Y.

"Moonglow" sure is a wonderful story, and, in fact, I think it is one of the best stories I have ever read in the ARGOSY. I have not missed a number in twenty-five years. "The Black Past" is the best story MacIsaac has written, I think. In regard to Western stories, you can't print too many of them to suit me. G. P. F.

DELAND, FLA.

Your magazine is sure on the topmost rung of the magazine ladder. All your stories are fine. Your Western stories are O. K., but the Mme. Storey works are fine, too. That last by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith was also fine, but I think "Moonglow," by Charles Francis Coe, was a masterpiece. To a Northerner of four years' residence in the South, it's grand, to the point and up-to-date with the wonderful work being done all over the South below the Mason and Dixon line. More like that will cause Northerners to come and see for themselves the wonders of the whole South. And with all the Western stories I have read, I have seen almost the same cowboys and girls, range cattle, *et cetera*, right here in Florida go by my door like another movie. Here's wishing for more stories like "Moonglow" soon. MRS. E. P.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

I just finished reading the last installment of "Moonglow," and I want to say that I have been a constant reader of the ARGOSY for three years, but without a doubt this is the finest story you have ever published. Please, oh, please let us have more stories of this type. Being from the South makes me doubly appreciate the story, and no one could have written this as well as it has been written by Charles Francis Coe. It took me back to my old Southern home and how proud I am that to-day we can say the old ill feeling between North and South is a thing of the past. Please give us more of Charles F. Coe. It is so refreshing to have good, clean, moral stories, and how wonderful it is to have stories of this type! Most all of the ARGOSY stories are above the average, but in "Moonglow" you have broken all past records. Let us have more of them. MRS. J. D. T.

LANSDALE, PA.

Please do not change our ARGOSY-ALLSTORY. It is just right as it is. Unless you would make it twice as thick—you know, with stories, not ads. I have been reading it about fifteen or sixteen years. I think it is the best magazine on the market excepting *Munsey's*. I wouldn't like all Western stories. MRS. A. M.

PARSONS, KANS.

The slogan of the Buick Auto Company is "When better automobiles are built, Buick will build them." For a somewhat similar reason I have been reading the ARGOSY for something like twenty-eight years, feeling sure that whenever a perfect scream of a story, that would make you forget all about the next month's installment on the furniture, was written, the good old ARGOSY would print it. Just for instance, "The Hawkins invention stories." By the way, what has become of old man *Hawkins* and friend,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Griggs, the victim? Would like to hear from them again. And now ARGOSY readers all over the United States, let's banish dull care and ride "On to Florida" with that happy-go-lucky bunch. We are off to a flying start and ready to go the limit, so let's have the rest of it.

P. S.—Have just read the first spasm of the story, but am laying a bet two to one that aunty lands in Florida with the rest of the bunch.

J. E. S.

RICHMOND, VA.

Yep, Westerns are very interesting, so was the hunting for the New England farm home. "You're Under Arrest"—fine! Give us more. Glad Giesy and Smith are back again. D. C. B.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

You asked an opinion on Mr. Worts's story, "Twin Bridges." My judgment is: the story is real. My only adverse comment would be, it was sent out under a misnomer. "Misunderstanding" would have been better, both for the bridges and the story. We poor blind mortals create nine-tenths of our own and our friends' heartaches through self-pride and misunderstandings. People seem to think it is humiliating to dignity, honesty and straightforwardness to ask an opinion of another, even if it is the best loved one of all. *Tony Vallant* was a fool like most of us, when it comes to amalgamation of our best love and our life's work, but his lassie, driven to the corner of desperation had more grit than *Tony* had. That is real life. Give us all you can find in that strain. J. C.

CHICAGO, ILL.

Here is speaking for over fifteen ARGOSY readers. As to more or fewer Westerns; give us plenty of them, we shout! Especially by such authors as C. F. Coe, Max Brand, Kenneth Perkins, George M. Johnson, William MacLeod Raine, Clarence E. Mulford, and Charles A. Seltzer. Please give us more novelettes like "Silver Guns" and "Baffling Trails." Now, Mr. Editor, stick to the saddle and give us what we want. Whoever says that C. F. Coe and Charles A. Seltzer are priceless must be a sure friend of Western stories. E. S.

DOUGLAS, GA.

More Westerns is my answer, though not too many. Publish more stories like "The Big Voice," "The Range Rider," and "Horsemen Against the Moon." I am a reader of ARGOSY as long as George M. Johnson and Fred MacIsaac write for it. Publish stories of the Far East occasionally. L. G. L.

DES MOINES, IOWA.

I have followed with interest the letters of your readers and have some very decided opinions as to likes and dislikes. I'm not wild about most of your Western stories. I like those that deal with the historic and mysterious West, but not the "shoot 'em all" and "let 'em lay" kind. I've read your book since it started, and so I think I know what I'm saying when I state that your stories are meeting my taste—*except* Semi Dual. I never did, and never will, have any use for those stories. I'd like more by Geo. A. England, and where's Fred Jackson? "What Price the World" was good, "Moonglow" was *wonderful!* I know that country. Why not a good war story, either Civil or World War? A few good auto racing, baseball or football stories, mix in some good comedy stuff and cut out a lot of the "wild and woolly West." *Heck,* there *just isn't* any of that any more. I've lived nearly all my life—thirty-six years—west of the Mississippi and I've worked in every State except Louisiana and I really can't say that I've seen more than a dozen Indians and a couple of cow-punchers who even, with a great stretch of imagination, came anywhere near being up to fiction stuff. Why, ninety per cent of them can't even shoot a six-gun. I know I can't. So let's have real up-to-date and peppy tales and I'll continue to invest ten cents per in ARGOSY. J. C. C.

BALBOA, CAL.

More or fewer Westerns? Let well enough alone. Our magazine stands are overcrowded with so-called "Western stuff" and most of it's impossible. Continue your policy of variety, and it must be a difficult editorial task to supply "variety" in publishing so much fiction. Give us our regular dose of adventure, detective, mystery, romance, business, sea, Western, Southern, *et cetera.* Don't forget South Sea stuff and a few Society ones once in awhile. Keep on your path, but with constant improvement and no yearly models.

J. F. K.

PANHANDLE, TEXAS.

Thanks for the invitation to express our likes and dislikes. I think it only natural that we of the West do not care for Western stories. We can see that they are not "true to life" as the West is to-day. To the Easterner they are romantic and entertaining, so to equalize things, why not go "fifty-fifty," say half Western and half otherwise—detective, mystery, *et cetera?* I and my friends here like such stories as "The Big Voice," "Midnight and the Private Car," "Without Stopping to Think," "Personality Plus" and "That Confounded Girl."

S. D. B.

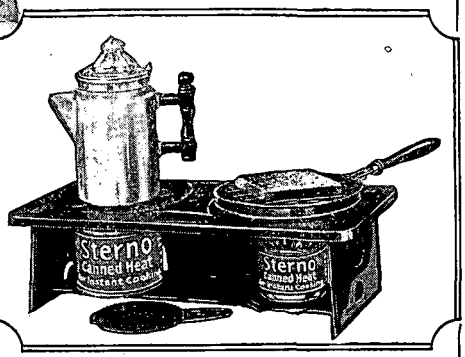
JOLIET, ILL.

The one marked point of interest and difference in Mr. Worts's "Twin Bridges" is the fact that the "key" person is not thoroughly revealed until the end of the story, although the author has excited sufficient curiosity, giving an abrupt satisfaction. Authors of many stories do too much of the thinking for their readers. Such stories leave a mechanical "canned music" taste, having accomplished nothing other than the waste of the readers' time. C. E. H.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In a Jiffy!

Piping Hot Breakfast Coffee And Crisp, Savory Toast—



with the Sterno Double Burner COOK STOVE

Introduced only a few months ago, the Sterno Double Burner Cook Stove so quickly proved its convenience for a hundred and one different uses, that now thousands on thousands of homes the country over enjoy its remarkable helpfulness.

Useful Day and Night

Quickly, conveniently, it prepares your morning toast and coffee—and that is only a start in its many uses. For heating baby's milk during the night—for the sick room, nursery, office—for the business girl in her room—for light ironing, hot water quick for shaving, soldering radio parts—for cooking or boiling scores of tempting dishes—wherever instantaneous heat is what you need—you can depend on handy, compact, Sterno Canned Heat, always ready, and trust the Sterno Double Burner Cook Stove—sturdy, efficient, reliable.

The new Sterno Double-Burner Cook Stove folds flat as a pancake for travelling use, sets up in a jiffy as a strong, substantial cooking outfit, and sells for only fifty cents—a most wonderful value. Made of double strength heavy gauge steel, it does practically all the ordinary kitchen stove can do—and beats it all hollow for convenience. Every home can afford it if only for the sake of emergency. Your home should have it. *Get it now and get the toaster free, as explained in the side column.*

ONLY **50c** AT YOUR DEALER

East of the Rocky Mountains
Double Burner Cook Stove . . 50c
Small size Canned Heat . . . 10c
Large size Canned Heat . . . 25c
In the Far West
Double Burner Cook Stove . . 50c
Small size Canned Heat, 2 for 25c
Large size Canned Heat . . . 30c
In Canada
Double Burner Cook Stove . . 75c
Small size Canned Heat . . . 15c
Large size Canned Heat . . . 35c

STERNO CANNED HEAT

THE CLEAN, CONVENIENT FUEL

Sterno is manufactured under U.S. Gov't Permit for use only as a fuel

Here is the Toaster You Can Get Free by Acting Now

Has a convenient folding handle—prepares delicious, crisp, brown toast quickly—no taste from fuel.

How to Get It

Go to your dealer and buy a Sterno Double Burner Cook Stove described on this page, and send us the guarantee slip you will find packed in the box, with your name and address, and toaster will be sent you.

If already a user of Sterno Canned Heat, send us five Sterno labels and we will send you the toaster free. If your dealer has not the 2-burner stove, send us 50c for the stove and the toaster will be sent with it. (Canada, 75c.)

STERNO CORP
Dept 493
9 East 37th St.
New York City

I enclose (check one of the following):

☐ Guarantee slip or
☐ Five Sterno labels or
☐ 50c (Canada, 75c)

for double burner stove to comply with your conditions for a free toaster.

*Name*_____

*Address*_____

*City*_____

This offer expires Dec. 31, 1926

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

First in the field

Baby Ruth is the best "forward pass" in the game; it scores every time—and all the time!

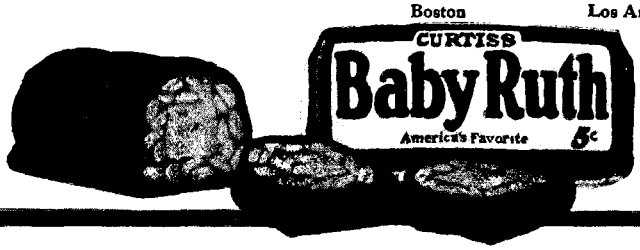
And it has the largest, most enthusiastic following of any candy in America.

Forty million people eat **Baby Ruth** with delight. Over five million bars are sold every day. Over $250,000 worth of nickels pass over the candy counters daily for this favorite confection.

Fits every taste—fit for any taste—Curtiss **Baby Ruth.**

CURTISS CANDY COMPANY

New York CHICAGO San Francisco
Boston Los Angeles



5c

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED